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A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO WHY AND HOW SPECIAL EDUCATORS LEAVE THE FIELD

A Dissertation

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

Dr. Susan Etscheidt

Dr. Dale Jackson

Dr. Gene Lutz

Dr. John K. Smith

Dr. Greg Stefanich

Dr. Thomas Switzer

Jane E. Caraway

University of Northern Iowa

August 2002

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August 2002

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A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO WHY AND HOW SPECIAL EDUCATORS LEAVE THE FIELD

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this inquiry was to take an in-depth look at special educators' decisions to leave the field of special education through their personal reflective stories. The study examined factors that influenced *why* these teachers made their decision to leave their chosen field. It also ventured into *how* those decisions were made in terms of the complex and personal events preceding their final departures. Throughout the inquiry the phenomena of special education teacher attrition was held up to a work adjustment framework. The framework explored the job satisfaction of these teachers during their experiences in special education and documented their eventual withdrawal from the field. The participants were a group of 12 former quality special education teachers who left the field of special education to transfer to general education positions. The inquiry explored the stories individually and collectively by unraveling the personal context of each of the storytellers, synthesizing the collective factors that influenced their decisions to transfer, and tracking each work adjustment cycle prior to departure.

The results of the inquiry indicated four areas that most influenced the teachers' decision to transfer out of their special education positions: lack of intangible rewards (support, value, respect, and growth); poor perception of personal influence; static view of work; and work adjustment issues. The results also revealed the 12 teachers did not leave the field because of student issues (unlike the results of many prior studies). They instead left because of issues they faced with adults in their work environment and with external pressures associated with the field of special education.

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To Kevin for his support and understanding, Sue for her encouragement and persistence, and Cate, Susan, and Di for coming through when they were most needed.

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PROLOGUE

SETTING THE STAGE

Background:

It is the end of August. A hotel in the state capital city is hosting a conference for public school administrators. The event has become an annual opportunity for school administrators and their spouses to let off a little steam before the beginning of another hectic school year. There are guest speakers and education vendors scheduled throughout the two-day event, but the social aspects of food, drink, and conversation seem to take precedence over the more formal learning activities.

Characters:

Dan Davis: High school principal from a small, northern school district. Went to graduate school with Paul.

Annette Davis: Currently a teacher of middle school social studies in a small school district adjacent to Dan's. Wife of Dan, attending the conference as a guest. Has become acquainted with Paul's wife Cindy through these annual meetings.

Paul McChesney: Middle school principal of a large middle school in a relatively large school district. Went to graduate school with Dan.

Cindy Bailey: Works in an executive position of the human resources division of a large company. Wife of Paul.

Jane Hall: Administrator and graduate student currently completing a doctoral program at a nearby university. Taught school with Annette many years ago and took graduate classes with Dan.

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ACT 1

Setting:

The scene begins with a couple (a high school principal and his wife) sitting in a restaurant booth in the early afternoon waiting for others to arrive. Both appear to be in their mid-forties or early fifties. A waiter has brought an ice tea and Amstel Light when another couple moves toward the booth. The woman is carting two shopping bags and looks red-faced from the heat. The man is wearing Docker shorts and sunglasses. The women embrace and rearrange the booth.

Paul: It's about time you got here. You've already been shopping?

Dan: Yes, you know how I love to shop. [*Dan roles his eyes*] We don't have big department stores in the sticks, you know.

Annette: Stop it. We were in Younkers a total of 40 minutes. So how are you two?

Cindy: Great, we got your card! The baby is adorable.

Annette: Thanks. Being a grandmother is a lot more fun than I anticipated. You don't mind the title once you see that baby's face. How is work?

Cindy: Good. Too busy of course. I keep telling myself that I'm going to cut down, but that never seems to happen.

Dan: [*Looking at Paul*] And how are things in the hallowed halls of Lincoln High?

Paul: Good. You know this is Jake's last year as superintendent.

Dan: Are you going to apply? You should you know.

Cindy: I keep telling him be careful what you wish for. Jake looks like he is 103. I'm supportive of course, but we hardly see each other as it is.

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[*Woman walks by to be seated in adjoining booth*]

Annette: [*Notices the woman and tries to get her attention*] Jane. [*Pause*] Jane Hall.

Jane: [*Startled, walks over to the booth to get a better look through her new bifocals*] Annette, Dan! How are you? I assume you're here for the conference?

Annette: Never miss it. Are you alone?

Jane: Yes, I missed lunch and thought I'd catch a quick bite. There are some people coming from the district, but they won't be here until tonight.

Dan: Join us. We haven't ordered yet. Do you know Paul? He's the principal at Lincoln, and this is his wife Cindy.

Jane: [*Sliding into the booth*]. Sure I know Paul. Nice to meet you Cindy.

Dan: Jane works in the central office at CP. She and I took classes together. By the way how's your doctorate coming?

Jane: OK. I'm finished with classes. Working on my dissertation.

Paul: Wow, that brings back horrific memories. What's your topic?

Jane: Retaining quality teachers. Special education teachers, specifically. It's a qualitative inquiry, sorry Dan, no statistical analysis.

Paul: I might actually like to read that one. We're having a terrible time hiring special education teachers and an even tougher time keeping them. It's been getting worse every year. We have ten special ed. teachers in the building. Nine of them aren't fully certified – five of them hadn't taught a day in their lives before they took these positions. The turnover has been unbelievable.

Dan: What are you complaining about? It's been like that forever in the rural districts. Imagine if you're having trouble finding teachers and keeping them what it's like for us in small schools. [*Pause*] Is this a national trend?

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Jane: Yes, it's definitely a problem everywhere. In the mid-nineties the attrition figure for special ed. was about 11% compared to 6% in general ed. Of those who leave special ed. about half end up transferring to general education. I'm guessing it's higher now. What's even scarier is that 30% to 50% of all new teachers will leave the field in their first five years. Special ed. just seems to be leading the way.

Annette: [*Looking at Jane*] So how are you approaching the study?

Jane: I toyed with doing an electronic survey, but that's been done before. I really wanted to let teachers talk about how they made their decisions. I ended up using a guided conversation format. I take the teachers out for dinner or coffee, and basically I just listen. I'm interviewing special ed. teachers who were considered strong teachers in their field but ended up transferring to a general ed. [*Pause*] Come to think of it you'd fit that sample, wouldn't you Annette?

Annette: [*Holds napkin over her face*] Look, I did six years in a special ed. classroom. I loved it on some levels but couldn't make it work on others. You just can't compare it to teaching seventh graders social studies.

Cindy: So why'd you leave?

Annette: I'm not even sure. It's complicated. When I got my master's degree in special ed. I assumed I'd teach it until I retired. But it just didn't work for me. To tell you the truth there's a lot of crap that goes along with special ed. I knew the kids would be tough. I wasn't prepared for the other stuff. I like the idea that you're asking teachers to tell their stories. I don't think a survey could begin to capture what I went through those last couple of years.

Jane: It's a complicated process. Most of the teachers I'm interviewing are not sure of exactly what didn't work. I'm trying to document their job satisfaction as it spanned their special ed. teaching years. I'm doing that over a series of interviews; actually conversations would be a better description.

Cindy: Who is responsible to see that a special education teacher is satisfied in her job? Would that fall on the principal?

Paul: I don't think there's much a principal can do when it comes to a dissatisfied special ed. teacher. If it's a good teacher, the best I can do is allow a transfer to general ed. and try to keep the teacher from leaving the profession altogether.

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Cindy: That's an interesting view. What do you think about that, Annette? You were a special education teacher who obviously had some dissatisfaction in your job. Could your principal have made a difference?

Annette: [Pause] I don't know. I liked my principal at the time. I guess I figured that *my* job satisfaction was *my* job satisfaction.

Cindy: How'd your principal react when you asked to be transferred?

Annette: He was floored actually. I don't think he saw it coming? He tried to get me to reconsider, but by then I'd already made up my mind. I remember sort of threatening to leave the district if I didn't get the transfer (in a nice way, of course). I knew there were going to be openings in Dan's district.

Dan: There's really not much a principal can do to keep teachers in special ed. classrooms. I think it's just a thankless job.

Cindy: But is it important to the organization?

Paul: Of course it's important. Very important. In fact it's very important to the principal. A bad special ed. teacher is a nightmare. I've spent as much as 50% of my time on special ed. issues in any given year when I had mediocre staff in those positions. Obviously it's very important to the kids. So many of those kids have had rough times, a good special ed. teacher can make a tremendous impact in their lives. I've seen it happen.

Cindy: Well, all I can say is that in our business we would take a much different approach. If I need to fill specialized engineering positions and the hiring pool is limited, I go to great lengths to recruit and retain those folks. It would become a top priority of the system.

Paul: But that's the business world. You have more options. We're bound by master contracts. We exist in a profession that has notoriously low pay. We just don't have access to incentives like you do. Besides that crap Annette was talking about in special ed. is completely out of my hands.

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Cindy: Look, it isn't as if I can offer people unlimited salaries. There're all sorts of ways to influence someone's job satisfaction. What I'm hearing is a difference in attitude. It sounds like Annette believed that she was on her own when it came to her job satisfaction, and you and Paul seemed to be saying that she probably was. If you two as principals don't believe you can make a difference in the job satisfaction of your teachers, then you can't. And if Annette doesn't believe it, then you definitely can't. Under the circumstances she did the only thing she could. When things got bad enough she left.

Jane: I taught with Annette during some of those years, and I remember her trying to do what she could to change things on her own. I'm finding the cycle of work adjustments goes back and forth for a substantial amount of time before teachers make that final decision.

Cindy: Annette, once you made the decision to leave was there anything your principal do to convince you to stay?

Annette: I don't think so. It was a tough decision I'd been wrestling with for a long time. I felt like a bit of a failure. I remember feeling an incredible sense of relief when I finally made the decision. I'm sure Dan felt it too, I'd been really miserable to live with those last few months. I don't think there's anything that could have convinced me to stay at that point. My mind was made up.

Cindy: What about earlier in the process? When you first started to struggle. Do you think there were things that could have made a difference?

Annette: Maybe. [*Pause*] Actually. [*Pause*] Probably. I don't really know.

Cindy: Well there's your clue guys. If you wait until the teacher is in your office telling you they're leaving, you've waited too long. It's too late.

Paul: I understand what you're saying Dear, but you have to understand that as a principal in a large school I can only meet personally with my new teachers a few times a year, and with my veteran teachers even less. I'd love to say that if Annette had been in my building I would have intervened in her situation earlier and maybe even convinced her to stick it out, but that probably isn't the case. I don't think I'd have been able to see the signs unless she told me how she was feeling. I'm not sure I'd know exactly what I was looking for. In your organization you have people that do nothing but work on human resource issues. You come out with a shiny new marketing plan every couple of years or so. It's just not like that in a public organization.

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Cindy: Well, maybe you delegate that responsibility to someone else. Department chairs, assistants – I don't know. But I do know if turnover is that high you're in for a decline in quality across the system, not just in one area. Retention of quality staff is going to have to become a priority. People just don't look at careers the way they used to. It may take more time for that trend to hit public education, but believe me it's coming. You will not be able to take for granted that there will always be people who want to be teachers – who'll stay in the profession no matter what. You two [*Looks at Dan and Paul*] may be able to ride out your traditional philosophies until you retire, but your successors won't be so lucky.

Paul: [*With a slight tone of sarcasm*] Maybe we should have you come figure it out for us.

Cindy: Well, that's not a bad idea, actually. Not me per se, but there's a lot of information in the business literature that could support your efforts. These issues are not new to us, and there are many facets of job satisfaction that don't deal with pay issues. Annette obviously left her job for reasons other than money.

Dan: Annette, do you think you would ever go back to special ed.?

Annette: I never say never, but I'd have to see some hard evidence that things have changed. [*Smiling*] Maybe after Jane figures it all out I'll consider it.

Jane: [*Shakes head and puts hand up in front of her*]
I'm only trying to look at the problem in a different way. I'm really not expecting hard and fast solutions. The problem is way too complex for that. I've watched teachers struggle with this for years. I went through it myself with my job last year. I know there's a lot more to their decisions than meets the eye. I figure if I can make some kind of sense out of these stories – maybe even track what they went through, what it looked like at the time – it may give us some insight into how to keep these teachers satisfied in their jobs.

While attending an administrator's conference this fall I ran into some old acquaintances during a lunch break. The preceding script is based on a spontaneous dialogue that took place during that conversation. The names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants, and the wording has been altered to fit the parameters of this document. It is intended to capture the content and flavor of that dialogue and not as a verbatim transcript. I chose to use it for the study to provide a preview of the issues around which the study is focused.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE DANCE OF WORK

As I sit in the empty preschool waiting for my four-year-old niece Olivia to put her toys away my distant thoughts are interrupted by her magical high-pitched voice asking, "Do you know what I want to be when I grow up Aunt Jane?" As I respond with appropriate interest she leaps from her chair collapsing to the floor in a cross between a mock curtsey and a fumbling pirouette. With one hand pointed toward the sky she emphatically, and quite dramatically, exclaims, "A princess... or... a teacher." Coming from the field of education I was delighted to hear of her possible aspirations to be an educator, and was not at all disheartened to have my chosen profession come in second place behind the honorable occupation of princess, at least not from the perspective of a four-year-old.

Olivia's response, albeit slightly impractical, would be representative of most young children when asked what they want to be when they grow up. They answer with some kind of occupation. Even at the tender age of four children assimilated into American culture begin to think of occupation as a defining life characteristic. By the time we reach adulthood work plays a critical role in our lives. According to Gini (2000), we spend two-thirds of our waking life on the job, and work is the way we come to *know* the world and are in turn *known* to the world. At a fairly young age work becomes and remains a part of our identity. It is easy to understand then, why the adjustment of an individual to a job, and in turn the adjustment of a job to an individual, becomes such an interesting and absorbing dance. It is a dance of tensions between the expectations of the

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individual and the expectations of the system as one seeks to shape and modify the other into a mutually gratifying social contract – a contract that is constantly changing over time. The topic of this study is about one such dance. It is about the processes, contexts, expectations, and adjustments of a group of special educators as they reflect on the decision they made to leave the field of special education. The study examines the factors that influence *why* these teachers made their decision to leave their chosen field. It also ventures into the uncharted territory of *how* those decisions were made in terms of the complex and personal events that preceded their final departures.

The practical implications of this inquiry have been visible to me for many years. As someone who has been responsible for supporting the recruitment, hiring, and retention of special education teachers, I have been increasingly concerned about the dwindling pool of quality human resources available to students with disabilities. Most of the research and literature on this issue focuses on the reasons why teachers leave the field, presented as discrete factors with little interconnectedness. It seems to imply that by remedying these factors one at a time, with discrete solutions, fewer teachers will leave the field of special education. Having watched teachers from a distance as they struggled to make the decision whether to stay in or leave the field of special education, it was clear to me the process was a complex and often emotional journey. Each journey seemed to have elements that were uniquely personal to each individual, yet I couldn't help but wonder whether the teachers' journeys also had certain aspects in common. I further questioned whether these processes might have elements that could be observed by those attempting to support the teachers, and whether those observations might assist

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in increasing the continuing job satisfaction of both novice and veteran teachers. My interest in this question led me to the current inquiry.

The focus of this inquiry was to unravel the decision-making processes of 12 carefully selected former special education teachers. The teachers in the study had several things in common: they all went into the field of special education expecting to stay in the field of special education; they all were considered to be teachers of outstanding quality; they were all highly educated (master's degrees) with appropriate certification; and they all left the field of special education for general education positions. The teachers told their own stories of why and when they decided to become special education teachers and of how their expectations changed over time. In listening to their reflections I identified barriers that impacted their job satisfaction and described how they attempted to make adjustments to overcome those barriers. I chose to use a guided conversation format because I felt it would reach beyond the depth of information found in the current research and would provide a tool for exploring a set of complex processes layer by layer. As Casey (1992) reinforces, current research often adopts the perspective that teacher attrition is defined as a result of "administrative demands for a stable workforce" (p. 187), instead of listening to the teachers' own stories. She states that:

> By systematically failing to record the voices of ordinary teachers, the literature on educators' careers actually silences them. Methodologically, this means that even while investigating an issue where decision-making is paramount, researchers speculate on teachers' motivations, or at best, survey them with a set of forced-choice options. Theoretically, what emerges is an instrumental view of teachers, one in which they are reduced to objects which can be manipulated for particular ends. (p. 188)

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In this study the teachers' stories became the core source of meaning. By listening to these teachers who have left the field, new perspectives may be gained in how to change the job satisfaction of the next generation of special educators.

Background of the Problem

> The [teaching] pool keeps losing water because no one is paying attention to the leak. That is, we're misdiagnosing the problem as recruitment when it's really retention. (Merrow, 1999, p. 38)

Recruiting and retaining quality teachers is a concern in all aspects of public education (National Education Association, 2001). Current research indicates that approximately 6% of the nation's public school teachers leave the field of teaching each year (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1998) with figures in specialized areas of teaching much higher. The attrition rate for special educators is approximately 11% (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, & Webber, 1995). New teachers in general are leaving teaching at a rate of 30% to 50% in the first four to five years (Darling-Hammond, 1997) and half of the current workforce is expected to retire due to aging Baby Boomers between 1998 and 2008 (NCES, 1998).

In the field of special education, teacher attrition has been of particular concern for many years (Billingsley, Bodkins, & Hendricks, 1993; National Information Center for Children and Youths with Disabilities [NICHCY], 1998). Studies have shown that special educators leave the field because of these factors: dissatisfaction with work assignments; the stress of working with students who have disabilities and intense problems; unfulfilled intrinsic rewards; personal change factors; and a perception of lack of support by administrators and colleagues (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Billingsley,

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Pyecha, Smith-Davis, Murray, & Hendricks, 1995). Other factors include the school culture, age, and certification status (Brownell, Smith, & Miller, 1995). As Miller, Brownell, and Smith (1999) state:

> The attrition of teachers is a critical issue for public school professionals attempting to provide a quality education to students with disabilities. High attrition rates of special education teachers can be costly and damaging to an education system in two ways. Besides the considerable expense of hiring and training new special education teachers, students may not gain from having inexperienced, particularly uncertified, teachers in an unstable learning environment...Teacher transfer across schools is also a serious problem when trying to achieve some stability in a learning environment. (p. 216)

Special education has been consistently designated as a critical shortage area in the United States (NICHCY, 1998). In the 1997-1998 school year, more than 4,000 full time equivalent special education teaching positions were vacant across the country, and an additional 32,000 special educators were not fully certified for their positions (Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP], 2000). The largest shortage areas (in terms of overall numbers) are for teachers of children with learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, and multiple disabilities. The greatest percentage of shortages for special educators by area are for teachers of children with autism, serious emotional disturbances, traumatic brain injury, deaf-blindness, and multiple disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Shortages are more pronounced in rural areas and urban areas but are becoming evident in suburban schools as well (NICHCY, 1998). The background of the problem rests in several areas. There are three critical factors: the continuous growth in the numbers of special education students, the work adjustment issues of special educators, and the attrition of special education teachers due to transfers to general education positions.

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The Continuous Growth in Special Education Numbers

The first factor is the imbalance between the growth in the numbers of special education students versus the numbers of qualified special education teachers available to teach them. Since 1975 the numbers of students identified as being entitled to special education has continued to rise. Between 1977 and 1996 the number of students identified as disabled increased from 8.3% to 12.4% of the total public school enrollment, an increase of 47% (NCES, 1997). The rate of growth in the number of students receiving special education continues to exceed the general student population year after year (U.S. Department of Education, 1995), adding to the already depleted pool of new special education teachers. Between 1984 and 1994 the need for special education teachers grew by 31% (NICHCY, 1998). Because of this, the numbers of special education teachers have simply not been able to keep pace with the growing numbers of students.

Work Adjustment

The second factor is found in the area of work adjustment. Teaching is a difficult occupation with many demands and expectations. All teachers need to have instructional skills and must be able to communicate with parents effectively. Special education teachers also must possess expertise in a wide range of disabilities, collaboration skills, legal knowledge, individual education plan (IEP) development and implementation skills, and the ability to modify the general curriculum (Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992). Special educators have reported many perceived barriers to meeting these expectations that may, in part, impact their decisions to leave or stay in the field of special education. These

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barriers include excessive paperwork (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Council for Exceptional Children, 1998); overwhelming caseloads and class size; lack of support from colleagues and administrators; inadequate resources (NICHCY, 1998); and incomplete preparation (Billingsley, 1993). Many new special educators express confusion between the expectations they formed during their preservice training and the realities of their classroom (Billingsley, 1993). Special education teachers commonly complain of not having adequate resources and equipment (Kueker & Haensley, 1991) and tell stories of using their own money to buy supplies or having to scrounge through the school for donations or leftovers. Prior studies indicate for many special educators the ongoing stress of working with students (and often families) who have such complex and intense needs creates the biggest barrier of all (Billingsley & Cross, 1991).

This imbalance between the expectations of the system and the expectations of the individual teacher creates work adjustment problems (Bolman & Deal, 1997). The teachers and the system make adjustments over time to try and resolve the conflict (Argyris, 1964). If this imbalance cannot be resolved the special education teacher may eventually end up transferring to a teaching position outside of special education or leaving education altogether.

Attrition Due To Transfer

The third major factor in the special education teacher shortage is found in the specifics of special educator attrition. Although the attrition rates for special education teachers vary over time due to age, experience, demographics, alternative employment opportunities, and teaching environments (Billingsley & Cross, 1991), they are much

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higher than those for general education teachers (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997; Boe, Cook, Bobbitt, & Weber, 1996). A 1995 study in Florida reported that 22.3% of special education teachers in the 1992-1993 school year transferred to general education (Brownell et al., 1995). Some urban areas report attrition rates as high as 30% (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Almost half of the attrition is due to special educators transferring to general education teaching positions (NICHCY, 1998), making general education transfer the major single source of special educator attrition. Changes in the availability of general education teachers may also be impacting the shortage of special education teachers. For the last decade there has been a surplus of teachers in many general education areas. This surplus created an added incentive for special education teachers to stay in the field of special education. We are now entering a cycle of general teacher shortages in most, if not all areas (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). In the near future teachers with dual special education and general education teaching endorsements will have more choices about which teaching positions are of interest to them. This will likely have a negative impact on school systems' ability to retain teachers in their special education positions. These changes suggest that although many factors have impacted the special education teacher shortage, retention of special educators is of primary concern.

Statement of the Problem

The shortage of special education teachers has reached crisis proportions. The pool of current special education teacher candidates cannot meet the projected needs. The retention of special education teachers has become of critical importance as one way

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to ease the shortage. Recruitment and training programs that encourage teachers to enter the field of special education can only be effective if special education teachers are willing to remain in those positions for an extended amount of time. Consistency in special education programming depends on the retention of quality special education teachers. There has never been a more critical time for public education to understand the world of the special educator. We need to explore the beliefs and passions that led these professionals to the field in the first place, and unravel the complex events that are pushing them out of the field in record numbers.

Overview of the Present Inquiry

Research Issues

The research issues of this study are to take an in-depth look at the career decisions of a former group of quality special educators. The issues and focus of the study are presented in a two questions:

1. What impacts special education teachers' decisions to leave the field of special education?

2. What are the events and activities that lead up to special education teachers' decisions to leave the field of special education?

Significance of the Study

The literature in the area of special education teacher attrition and retention is limited to a relatively small number of studies taking place primarily in the 1980s and 1990s. It repeatedly notes the critical shortages of trained special education teachers in addition to the loss of experienced teachers (Billingsley, 1993; Billingsley et al., 1995; Brownell & Smith, 1993). The core literature base is immured within a small group of

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authors. The research is primarily quantitative in nature. It provides an adequate broad examination of surface factors relating to the attrition and retention of special education teachers. Little of the research, however, addresses the issue of how teachers go about making those decisions. The majority of these studies used mailed questionnaires, with a variety of forced-choice techniques in combination with open-ended questions. In most of the studies teachers were presented with options regarding internal, external, and personal factors that might affect their decisions on staying in or leaving the field of special education. The purpose of the studies was to create a list of common factors that impact a special educator's decision to leave the field so those factors might be changed. These studies do a relatively good job of meeting that purpose.

The problem with the studies is that they treat the teacher's decision to leave the field as if it was an isolated event with common, discrete parts instead of a complex, context-bound process that is personal to each individual. The information from participants is limited by the research methodology. One noted researcher in this area, Billingsley (1993), suggested that in-depth interviews would offer special educators the opportunity to reflect on their decisions within the context of their own personal experiences. Such an approach could explore how specific special educators interpret the highly individualized, dynamic and complex variables that contributed to their career decisions. This study expands and enhances prior research by using qualitative inquiry to explore subtleties and nuances of the reflections, reactions, and descriptions of the participants with regard to why and how they leave the field of special education.

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The descriptive framework for this study is rooted in general work adjustment concepts that explore the issues from a new perspective.

Descriptive Framework

As people enter the workforce they tend to go through some similar patterns of experience. The individual enters the job with a set of expectations for the system, while at the same time the system has expectations for the individual (Bolman & Deal, 1997). Some of the expectations are overt, perhaps even documented in writing. Others are less visible and are often embedded within the social and political structure of the system and the individual's beliefs and experiences. At the point the individual begins a new job, the dance begins. It is a dance of tensions between dueling expectations. As time goes by, the individual and system go back and forth trying to maintain a balance that satisfies the needs of both. These adjustments and readjustments continue throughout the individual's career as long as an adequate level of satisfaction is maintained. If the adjustments are unsuccessful, the system takes measures to remove the individual from the job, or the individual takes measures to leave the job. Usually, before the individual makes that decision there are signs of psychological or physical withdrawal that can last for months or even years (Argyris, 1964).

In Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership, Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal (1997) explore the issues of the "fit" between individual and organization in their conceptual human resource frame. It is built on core assumptions that highlight this relationship:

1. Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the reverse.

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2. People and organizations need each other: Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities.

3. When the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer: Individuals will be exploited or will exploit the organization - or both will become victims.

4. A good fit benefits both: Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed. (p. 102-103)

In reviewing this human resource frame it becomes clear it is critical for those who work with special educators to understand the need for a good fit between the individual and the organization. They must be able to recognize the pattern of adjustments and readjustments in which the special education teacher engages as he or she moves throughout multiple environments within the school and community. It is also important to understand the variety of roles special educators are expected to play throughout their careers. The process is an extremely interdependent relationship that is constantly evolving. As Chris Argyris points out in Integrating the Individual and the Organization:

> Organizations are extremely complex systems. As one observes them they seem to be composed of human activities on many different levels of analysis. Personalities, small groups, intergroups, norms, values, attitudes all seem to exist in an extremely complex multidimensional pattern. The complexity seems at times almost beyond comprehension. Yet it is this very complexity that is, on one hand, the basis for understanding organizational phenomena, and on the other, that makes life difficult for an administrator. (1964, p.11)

The dance between the individual and the system begins the day the special education teacher accepts the job. The individual comes into the new role with a set of expectations that have been shaped by prior experience, personal background, level of expertise, preservice training, and personal beliefs. The organization lays out its overt expectations by providing the new hire with items such as a copy of the strategic plan,

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master contract, job description, rules and regulations, etc. As the individual begins to become familiar with the work environment and the people within the environment, less overt, but equally important expectations begin to emerge. Once the individual moves past an initial stage of compliance (Argyris, 1964), a series of adjustments begins to take place. The adjustments can be made by both the individual and the system. Sometimes the adjustments consist of changes in behavior but at other times they may actually be a change in expectation. These behaviors can take many different forms, but they provide great insight into how individuals make decisions to leave their work.

Literature on Work Adjustment

The literature on work and work adjustment is vast. It ranges from the statistical surveys of the social scientists to the insights of conventional wisdom and philosophical analysis (Gini, 2000). Much of the work centers on the concept of a "good fit" between the individual worker and the organization and recently with the concept of job satisfaction (Gini, 2000; Hakim, 1994). Both concepts are important to the descriptive framework of this study. Both concepts also deal in some way with the constant tension that exists between the individual's expectations for his or her work and the organization's expectations of the worker (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Getzels & Guba, 1957). Many models create stages of satisfaction that workers go through to reach their full potential focusing on personality (Maslow, 1970) and motivational factors. (Herzberg, 1996).

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How People Leave Their Jobs

While ample literature exists on *why* people leave their jobs, the literature is less abundant on *how* people leave their jobs. Chris Argyris (1964) lists six ways individuals respond to extreme frustration in their work:

1. They withdraw – through chronic absenteeism or simply by quitting.

2. They stay on the job but withdraw psychologically, becoming indifferent, passive and apathetic.

3. They resist by restricting output, deception, or sabotage.

4. They try to climb the hierarchy to better jobs.

5. They form groups (such as labor unions) to redress the power imbalance.

6. They socialize their children to believe that work is unrewarding and hopes for advancement are slim.

For the conceptual framework of this study, Factors 1, 2, and 4 are of particular interest. In public education, as in other professionally based organizations, additional nuances exist due to the nature of such highly intellectual organizations. Because the "front line" workers in a public school are expertly trained teachers, the framework must take into consideration the additional complexities of the teachers' decisions regarding their careers (Galbraith, 1997) and explore turnover from a number of different perspectives.

Employee turnover. The literature on employee turnover offers a simple, but interesting way to categorize attrition. Employee turnover can be represented by a four point matrix (Naumann, 1992). The cells of the matrix represent the nature of the attrition and can be labeled voluntary, involuntary, external (to the organization), and internal (to the organization). *External* turnover occurs when an individual leaves the

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organization to pursue other employment. *Internal* turnover occurs when an individual stays within the organization but is promoted or transfers to another position. *Voluntary* turnover exists when the individual chooses to make the change, and inversely, *involuntary* turnover exists when the individual does not choose to make the change. The variables of functional and dysfunctional turnover can also be added to the mix in describing employee turnover. The question is whether the turnover is ultimately *functional* (productive for the organization), or is *dysfunctional* for the organization (having a negative impact on the organization as a whole). (See Figure 1.)

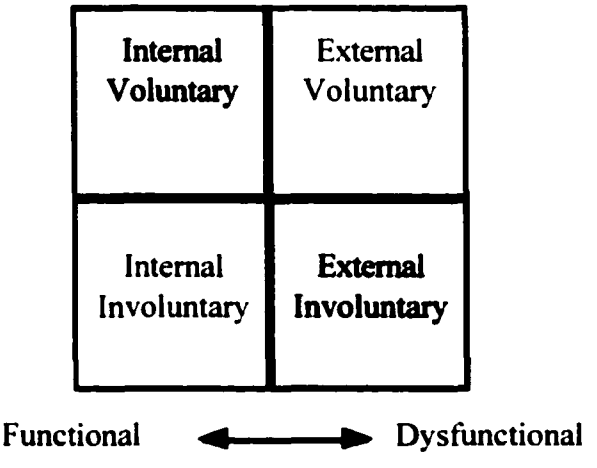

Figure 1. Employee turnover.

Special education teacher attrition can fall into any of these categories. In this study, however, the sample population all made voluntary, internal transfers to general education positions. The interesting question within the study population is whether the transfers were functional or dysfunctional to the system as a whole. One could argue that keeping quality teachers in the system, even if they leave the field of special education, is

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still functional for the organization. It could also be argued, however, that because these quality special education teachers come from a high demand teacher shortage area, it is unlikely their replacements will maintain the same level of quality. Therefore, the transfers would be considered dysfunctional to the system.

Supporting job satisfaction. The Minnesota theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Lofquist & Dawis, 1969) follows a trait-and-factor approach, matching abilities with job requirements, and personal needs and values with reinforcers available in a specific work environment. It was created for use in the vocational rehabilitation of adults with disabilities but has application to all workers. In this model workers act and react to the work environment as situations change. They struggle to change those parts of the work environment needed to meet their own sense of fit or balance. In any system, however, there are environmental characteristics that can be altered by the worker, and those that can not. The Minnesota theory assists vocational counselors in defining the barriers individuals face in particular work environments, and in providing supports for those adjustments that can be made within an organization. This model opens up the concept of adjustments made by the individual and also adjustments that can in turn be made by the organization. Using this model, a special education teacher who fulfills the school's expectations would be termed a *satisfactory* worker, while the teacher whose requirements are fulfilled by the work environment would be considered a *satisfied* worker. The work of Dawis and Lofquist assists in this study by strengthening the idea that teachers may be able to be supported in their attempts to adjust to the system, and that job satisfaction may be altered through intervention.

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Interactive elements. Hershenson's (1974, 2001) model of work adjustment takes a developmental approach. It posits that work adjustment is the interaction among three interacting domains within the person and the person's work environment: work personality, work competencies, and work goals. The three domains within the person develop sequentially, each largely shaped by a particular, stage-specific environment. This model follows the systems approach devised by Bronfenbrenner (1979), in which systems are described as a set of nested structures, each inside the next. The three subsystems develop and function interactively, establishing a dynamic balance while interacting with the behavioral expectations of the work setting, the skill requirements of the job, and the rewards and opportunities offered by the work setting. This interaction then manifests itself in work role behavior, task performance, and worker satisfaction. In Hershenson's model, work adjustment involves the total interaction between the person and elements of the work setting and provides a glimpse of how the various elements of work adjustment might fit together interactively.

Building a Descriptive Framework

All of these work adjustment theories and models provided grounding for the initial descriptive framework of this study. None by themselves is focused enough on the research issues to be used as the sole model for this study, but taken collectively they provide a general framework from which to begin. The organizational theorists (Argyris, 1964; Bolman & Deal, 1997) emphasize the responsibility of the organization to adjust to the individual in order to create a healthy work environment. Argyris (1964) begins to identify the events and behavioral states that workers may go through when the fit is no

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longer one of benefit to the worker. Dawis and Loftquist (1984) also describe a kind of give-and-take in which workers and systems engage in order to create satisfactory and satisfied workers, and they emphasize the possibility of intervention to support that adjustment. Finally, Hershenson (1974, 2001) expands on this concept by interjecting a developmental approach with the worker at the center of a constant cycle of interaction with the changing work environment.

The descriptive framework used in the study was based on general concepts found in the work adjustment literature. It assumes as people attempt to change important aspects of their work they go through some similar patterns of experience. Those experiences involve a series of adjustments by the individual and often involve signs of psychological (and sometimes physical) withdrawal from the job itself. The adjustment patterns are ultimately unique to the individual and the context may vary greatly in duration depending on the intensity of the individual's decision. The work adjustment framework used for this study (depicted in Figure 2) provided a lens from which to view each of the 12 teacher's stories.

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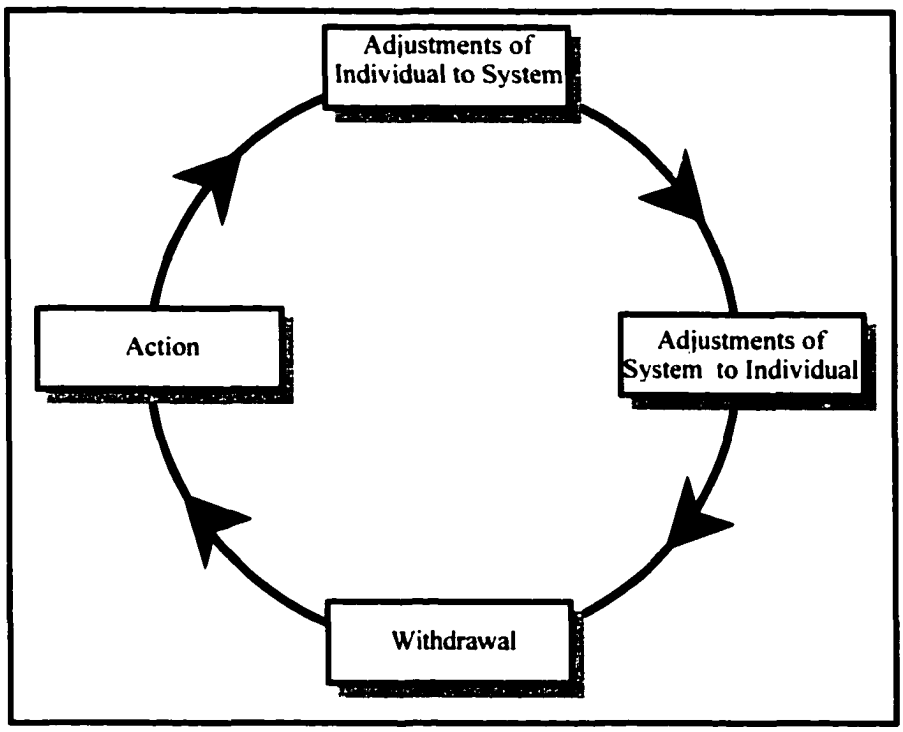

Figure 2. Initial work adjustment framework.

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CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY: INQUIRY THROUGH REFLECTION

Research Approach

The focus of inquiry in this study is to gain understanding of special educators' decisions to leave their chosen field. The study explores why they chose to leave the field of special education and what events and actions led up to their final departures. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) explain that the goal of qualitative research is to "develop understanding rather than showing relationship between variables or making prediction" (p. 41). It is not the intent of the study to make sweeping generalizations about why and how these teachers left the field. It is instead, an attempt to present contextualized findings that can be interpreted to bring greater meaning to a serious educational problem. The reason for the use of a qualitative approach for this study versus the quantitative approaches of prior studies is reflected in Eisner's (1998) views on using qualitative inquiry to improve schools. "I do not believe improvement of our schools is likely if we distance ourselves from their problems or their achievements. Detachment and distance are no virtues when one wants to improve complex social organizations or so delicate a performance as teaching" (p. 2).

Researchers in this area have also indicated a need for this type of methodology. Brownell and Smith (1992), who have been involved in studying the attrition and retention of special education teachers, recommended in-depth interviews and life histories to flesh out the complexities of the teachers' decision-making processes. Billingsley (1993) also supports the idea of further research using an in-depth interview

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approach, since much of the previous data have been based on fixed-response questionnaire items and survey methodology. Billingsley recognized that these methods "constrain teachers' responses and give little information about the specific contextual influences that contribute to attrition/retention decisions" and that "in-depth interviews ... are important" because, "teachers' perceptions and experiences are critical missing pieces of the data base" (p. 167). This inquiry focuses on perceptual differentiation and the ability to see what is subtle, but significant, in this phenomena. It assists participants in unraveling complex aspects of their work and personal lives through guided reflection as held up to a work adjustment framework.

Research Design

The study begins using Bogdan and Biklen's (1998) modified analytic induction approach. This approach is used when a specific problem or issue is the focus of the inquiry. Although this approach is not necessarily linear, several steps are commonly used. A pilot study is often used as an initial starting point (Stake, 1995). Data from the pilot study are collected and analyzed to develop a descriptive framework that encompasses the cases surrounding the issue. The descriptive framework serves as a rough definition and explanation of the particular phenomenon (Robinson, 1951). As the study progresses the explanation or framework is held up to the new data and is modified, left in tact, or discarded. Using this approach the analysis becomes more encompassing as new cases are presented, although the developing theory or framework tends to become more defined.

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Focus of the Literature Review

The literature review for this study took place over a three year period. It had an important impact on the study, because it eventually led to the focus of the current inquiry. The review was divided into two areas. The first area focused specifically on issues surrounding the field of special education. In this area I searched for and synthesized information related to the following: the special education teacher shortage, the current state of the workforce in special education, attrition factors, and specific work adjustment issues of special education teachers. This area was well defined by a relatively small number of researchers and authors. After reviewing the literature on special education teacher attrition and retention, I came to believe that the unanswered questions still remaining might be found in the deeper details, which were missing from many of the studies. I knew from my experiences in special education over two decades that the results of many of these studies were somehow incomplete in terms of creating pragmatic implications for those who are desperately trying to retain quality special education teachers. Having been an active part in a variety of unsuccessful remedies spawned by this literature, I also believed that multiple new perspectives were needed. A combination of these factors led me to the research questions and approach of the current inquiry.

The second area of the literature review focused on work adjustment issues in general. I began this review after completing the pilot study. I realized that exploring the adjustment patterns of the teachers as they struggled with difficult decisions about their work might be a new perspective from which to frame the current research questions.

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Although the literature on general work issues is vast, the specific literature available on work adjustment was much smaller in scope and did not include specific research on special educator attrition and retention. The concepts and models, however, gave me new insight into approaching many of the questions with which I was grappling regarding special educator attrition and retention. In this area I searched for and synthesized information related to work adjustment and fit, job satisfaction, how people leave jobs, changing attitudes toward work, and work adjustment theory.

Pilot Study

A small pilot study was conducted four months prior to the study. According to the literature, trying out interview questions and probes helps to structure a study (Stake, 1995), and allows for an initial conceptual framework to emerge (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The pilot consisted of interviews (approximately two hours a piece in length) of two teachers who fit the intended purposive sample but were not included in the actual study. The interviews suggested the work adjustment framework and directed me toward a literature review in that area. The pilot also encouraged the use of the guided conversation format since very little direction or probing was necessary throughout the conversations. The settings for the pilot interviews, which were held away from the work environment, assisted in providing opportunities for dialogue that were comfortable and uninterrupted. Prior to the pilot I was wrestling with a way to go beyond the traditional focus of prior studies which asked participants to identify the surface factors that influenced their decisions to leave the field. I wanted to examine those factors in more depth and also to explore their decisions from a more observable angle. The

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conversations of the pilot teachers took me in a different direction and opened up the concept of relating to the work adjustment of each of these teachers. It pointed me to look not only at attrition factors and barriers, but also at the events and activities during a complex decision-making process that took place over a substantial length of time.

The Beginnings of a Descriptive Framework

From those interviews I developed a loose descriptive framework about common phases teachers may go through as they make difficult decisions about entering, staying in, or leaving special education. The framework borrows from Bolman and Deal's (1997) human resources frame and concepts found in the work of Argyris (1964), Dawis and Loftquist (1984), and Hershenson (1974) with regard to organizational responsibility, physical and psychological withdrawal, adjustment phases, and the interconnectedness of the individual and system elements in the workplace. This descriptive framework served as a guide throughout the interviews and explored three main topics: expectations of the individual and the system; adjustments and readjustments of the individual and the system as a part of the "dance" to find a satisfactory balance or "fit" between the needs of both; and examples of events prior to the participant's final decision to leave the field. As the study progressed and more interviews took place the work adjustment framework was modified and shaped by the experiences of the teachers.

Participants

The focus of the inquiry and research design suggested a purposive sample of educators who entered the field of special education intending to stay but ended up transferring to a general education position. The sample is intended to assure variety of

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perspectives but not necessarily representativeness or typicality as might be found in a quantitative study. The participants in this study were chosen because their perspectives were believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory and descriptive framework. Principals and Area Education Agency (AEA) staff were asked to suggest a candidate pool of former special education teachers who were of high quality and who (they knew or suspected) had intended to remain in special education, but ended up requesting a transfer to a general education position. Those making the recommendations needed little guidance as to what made up a "quality" special education teacher, although I did supply them with a brief description of a potential candidate who fit the sample:

> A former education teacher who left the field of special education to assume a general education position. A teacher who you know or suspect intended to stay in the field of special education. A teacher who is committed to student learning and demonstrates skills and attitudes that would make you hire this teacher again without reservation.

Twenty candidates were recommended. The sample was narrowed to 12 who could commit to the rigors of the interview schedules and were interested in participating. The purpose of this sample was to hone in on the reasons these teachers left their field and what that process looked like. By choosing only teachers who left special education to transfer to general education positions the sample eliminated teachers who left for reasons such as poor health, child rearing, and financial gain. This purposive sample seemed ideal for examining issues of system influence on the teachers' decisions. Twelve special education teachers who left special education teaching positions for general education teaching positions acted as the initial participants. The participants were chosen from one of two Iowa school districts (one large district and one small

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district). The districts were chosen because they were easily accessible in terms of location, and because they had large pools of potential candidates who fit the purposive sample population.

The participants came from a mix of elementary, middle, and high school levels in order to provide a range of multiple perspectives. The mix of teaching levels is intended to provide a variety of participants but is not intended to be confused with a random sample in which the participants in the study would appear in the same proportion as they appear in the total population. Five of the teachers taught in elementary positions, four at the middle school level, and three at the high school level. The teachers left special education to fill a wide variety of general education positions including elementary, social studies, at-risk, reading, physical education, English, and math. All the teachers had a master's degree, many having hours beyond their masters. Each of the teachers was appropriately certified to teach in the particular area of special education in which he or she was assigned. The average age of the participants was 38 with a range of 25 to 46. The average number of years the participants taught in special education was 8, with a range from 2 to 20. Nine of the teachers were female, and three were male. Participation in the study was voluntary and assurances were provided in writing as to any risks that may occur as a part of the study, as well as the confidential nature of their participation. Signed consent forms were secured from all participants (example of consent form found in Appendix A). Pseudonyms are used to represent the participants. All the participants agreed to multiple interviews and committed to be available for a timeline of up to one year.

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Data Collection

Stake (1995) states that " the interview is the main road to multiple realities" (p. 64). Data in this study were collected through a series of multiple one-to-one interviews through a guided conversation format. I conversed with the teachers over a period of ten months in two to three individual interviews (one teacher asked for a fourth interview). Using a series of open-ended questions as starting points for the interview, my intent was to engage the teachers in conversation and storytelling that surpassed a question and answer session. I hoped to gain insight into a complex process that would unravel over the course of the conversations. I tried to create as relaxing an environment as possible and allowed the participants to influence decisions regarding the location and duration of the interviews.

During the span of the interviews many of the teachers chose to also include e-mail correspondence and phone correspondence as a part of their input. Because the interviews were based on the reflections and memories of the teachers (some that spanned a large amount of time) it was preferable for them to send me a note or call me on the phone when they remembered something they viewed as critical. While I had not originally planned on using these forms of communication, they ended up serving a valuable purpose and helped to engage the teachers in thinking about their reflections outside of the actual face-to-face interviews. By including the participants in designing the process their level of thoughtfulness and commitment seemed to increase.

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Interview Questions

The interview questions were used as a starting point only, making the conversations less formal than a structured interview. A guided conversation technique (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) was used that allowed one idea to build upon and flow into another. While this technique is not without its hazards (the conversations can easily get off track or ramble) my previous experiences in interviewing and consulting allowed me to redirect the participants when necessary. Some of the personal information shared, even if it was not directly related to a question, helped to strengthen the context of each individual teacher and added to the richness of the stories. The interviews, guided by the descriptive framework of the preliminary pilot activities, probed the areas of personal context, individual expectations, organizational expectations, work adjustment patterns, and withdrawal. The initial questions that guided the conversations were:

1. Think about when you first thought about going into special education. When was it and what things led up to it?

2. Tell me about your year(s) as a special education teacher. What were they like?

3. Think about the events that took place over your years as a special education teacher. Think about the events that may have shaped your job satisfaction over that period. What were some of the events you recall?

Interview Layers

Using this approach allowed me to think of the interviews as a series of layers, beginning with more general and superficial layers and ending with deeper, more complex reflections. The numbers of interviews depended on the amount of time it took to fully explore the research issue. The average time each participant spent being

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interviewed was approximately five hours (over the course of all the interviews combined). All the participants needed at least two interviews to close out the process. Seven teachers chose to have three interviews. Four of the teachers chose to complete the process in two face-to-face interviews and added multiple e-mails or phone conversations to provide additional information. One teacher requested a fourth interview.

Participation of the Teachers

The length of the interview sessions and the amount of additional information provided tended to vary with the age and experience of the teachers. The tone and attitude of the teachers also varied by age and experience. The participants who had taught less than five years in special education tended to be younger and at the beginning of their careers. Their memories were fresher and more easily retrieved. They also seemed to be more apologetic about leaving the field and appeared to be less comfortable talking about the process of their decision-making. The older, more experienced teachers were at points in their lives that seemed to welcome reflection and self-analysis. They were eager to dissect their reflections into new meanings and often went beyond the scope of the study in their thoughtfulness about that period of their lives. Concrete recollections, however, were more difficult for this group and before the second interviews I provided them with a graphic organizer to chart the events and timeline of their careers. These middle-aged Baby Boomers had much more to remember than did the younger participants and (as I well know) a little less acuity in their memory skills at this stage of their lives.

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Validation of Information

The results and implications in this study emerge through the stories and reflections of the teachers. The perceptions of the teachers are paramount in examining why they made their personal decisions and therefore those perceptions are the only valid basis for creating meaning from the stories. It is not important that the memories be accurate from anyone else's perspective or that they are validated from another source. Only their perceptions and reflections are important in examining the research questions. Many opportunities were provided to the participants throughout the study to check the accuracy of my perceptions, and to validate their own recollections as their stories unfolded through each layer of the interview process. Multiple interviews allowed me to revisit specific issues at length and allowed the participants to add to prior thoughts at a comfortable pace. Each interview acted as a layer in the story and built upon the next, allowing for more in-depth and thoughtful reflections.

First Interview: The Story

For the first interviews the teachers were asked to pick a local restaurant for dinner (at my expense). I used a small tape recorder to record the sessions and brought a small pad for notes. During the appetizers I explained in more detail the focus of the study and the confidentiality agreement. I also gave them a chance to ask any questions they might have before we got started and to share any concerns about their participation. Partially because we went through the course of a meal the first interviews tended to be longer in duration.

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Because this was our first meeting these sessions were filled with lots of personal information and generalities. All of the teachers were open to sharing their experiences, but it took a little bit of time for some of them to get comfortable and into the rhythm of the conversation. The stories were fruitful and tended to identify the factors that dissatisfied them about being a special education teacher. There was also a lot of discussion about the current state of special education in general, as well as observations regarding current special education programs in their districts. It was during these interviews I realized some of the more experienced teachers needed help in organizing their memories. I created a simple graphic organizer for them to jot down dates and timelines and mailed it to them before the second interview.

Second Interview: The Conversation

The second interviews tended to be the richest in terms of going beyond what has typically been reported in research on this topic. Approximately two months elapsed between the first and second set of interviews. Most of the teachers spent considerable time on their own making notes about ideas from the first interview, and many constructed a timeline of their teaching experiences. Between interviews I analyzed the first sessions and began the process of documenting the events proceeding up to their withdrawal from special education. Because of the preparation these interviews tended to be shorter but actually more productive, than the first interview sessions. These interviews were also tape recorded and were held at a variety of locations ranging from restaurants to classrooms by choice of the individual teacher. The length of these sessions had the greatest variation, ranging from one hour to three hours.

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It was during this second round of conversations the deepest layer of information began to emerge. The teachers had given considerable time and thought to their decisions in ways they had probably not done before. In some cases they retracted statements made in the first interview because of new memories or more careful contemplation. Compared to the first interview the second interview was more of a conversation and less of a story telling session. These reflections tended to be emotional and intellectual at the same time. They revealed a much more complex decision-making process that took place over a significant period of time. At the beginning of these conversations the teachers explored their definition of job satisfaction and their beliefs surrounding what it means to have high or low job satisfaction, who is responsible for one's job satisfaction, and how their own satisfaction vacillated during the course of the decision-making process. The end result of these sessions was therapeutic to some and enlightening to others. All of the participants seemed to learn new things about themselves and their work through this reflective process. As a researcher, I found the most valuable meanings from the study in the second round of interviews.

Third Interview: Checking and Closure

At the beginning of the process I had involved the teachers in setting up the logistics of the data collection portion of the study. They were able to choose the location of the interviews and the length of each session. Although I had not intended to use e-mail or phone conversations as methods of gaining information in the study, several of the teachers suggested this method and it turned out to be very useful. Four of the teachers did not choose to have a third interview. In one case the second interview had

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been more than three hours long, and the teacher felt we had come to adequate closure in just two interviews; I agreed. The three other teachers chose to use the e-mail and phone options to conclude the process. These four participants provided some of the most valuable insights in the study, and the alternative scheduling met both of our needs. The third interviews were the shortest. Most were held in classrooms or at coffee shops. Approximately two to three months had passed between the second and third interviews. They varied in structure but centered on bringing the stories to closure. I did tape record these interviews, but the most pertinent information was documented by hand through notes and charts. I used the third interview as a chance to check my facts and perceptions, and the teachers used the third interview to revisit any area that was troublesome or unfinished in their minds. One teacher wanted a fourth interview (she just wasn't quite ready to put "THE END" on her story). We met the following week and wrapped things up. All the participants seemed to gain something from the process and were pleased to have taken part in the experience.

Analysis

In qualitative inquiry there is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a process of giving meaning to first impressions, as well as to final compilations (Stake, 1995). It is a process of working with concepts, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what to tell others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The work adjustment framework was used to guide the study using a modified analytic induction approach. Through the pilot interviews I developed a

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rough definition and explanation of the particular phenomenon which became the work adjustment framework. With each new interview I held this definition and explanation up to the data as they were collected using field notes during the interviews, interpretation logs immediately following the interviews, personal context summaries at crucial points of the inquiry, thematic maps, and work adjustment charts. The interpretation process was formative and continual throughout the study. With each interview I searched for emerging themes regarding factors that influenced the teachers' decisions. Each individual case was then analyzed with relationship to the framework. Multiple interviews allowed me to check my interpretations with participants throughout the formative process. The participants were also given the opportunity to give input on the summative interpretations of the study.

Analysis of Individual Stories

Before the stories were synthesized and collective meaning could be created, each individual story was analyzed. The individual analysis was an ongoing part of the interview process with the more formal analysis taking place in the months in between interviews. The process and products of the individual analysis are depicted in Figure 3.

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SESSION 1	• Tape record 1st session. • Take notes. • Listen to tape of Session 1 and create Summary of Context and Individual Thematic Map. • Listen to tape of Session 1 again and create Individual Work Adjustment Chart.
SESSION 2	• Tape record 2nd session. • Take notes. • Review Individual Work Adjustment Chart with teacher and adapt. Add job satisfaction level for each event. • Add or change Individual Thematic Map. • Listen to tape of Session 2 and add or adapt all graphic organizers.
SESSION 3	• Tape record 3rd session (and 4th session in one case). • Take notes. • Review graphic organizers. • Listen to tape of Session 3 and add or adapt all graphic organizers.

Figure 3. Process and products of individual analysis.

Summary of Personal Context

Between each interview I created and continuously adapted a summary of each participant's story. It included personal information, educational philosophies, current teaching positions, future aspirations, etc. The summary focused on those things that made each teacher's situation special and personal. It was compiled from the notes taken during the interview sessions, tapes of the interview sessions, and in some cases e-mails and phone calls from the participants. A chart of demographic information was created to assist in organization as the study progressed. A coding process was not used in the summary because commonalities were not being sought. The personal context of each teacher is reported in Chapter III.

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Thematic Map of Individual Factors

During the first interview the data from each individual conversation were tape recorded and captured in field notes. Between the first and second interviews I listened to the tape of the first session twice looking for specific information. During the first playback I looked for factors that in someway impacted each individual's decision to transfer. Those factors were organized and categorized using an affinity diagram format. Each cluster of factors was given a header. Those factors and headers were then placed in a thematic map, an example of which can be seen in Figure 4.

Individual Work Adjustment Charts

Between the first and second interviews I listened to each tape a second time to look for work adjustment events or mileposts that (in the perceptions of the teachers) were significant in their work adjustment throughout that period of their careers. It was used as a chart tool to illustrate the events leading up to each teacher's departure from special education. This chart contained each major event or activity the participant remembered as an important milestone, and his or her level of job satisfaction at the time of these events or activities. Each event was then coded as an adjustment (A), barrier (B), or withdrawal (W). This process took place after the first interviews. The charts were then modified throughout the second and third interviews as information was added, changed, or revised. The charts visually depicted the series of events that took place within the special education portion of the participants' teaching careers. It displayed each major barrier the teacher faced and the series of adjustments that followed that barrier. It also showed the points at which signs of withdrawal could be identified.

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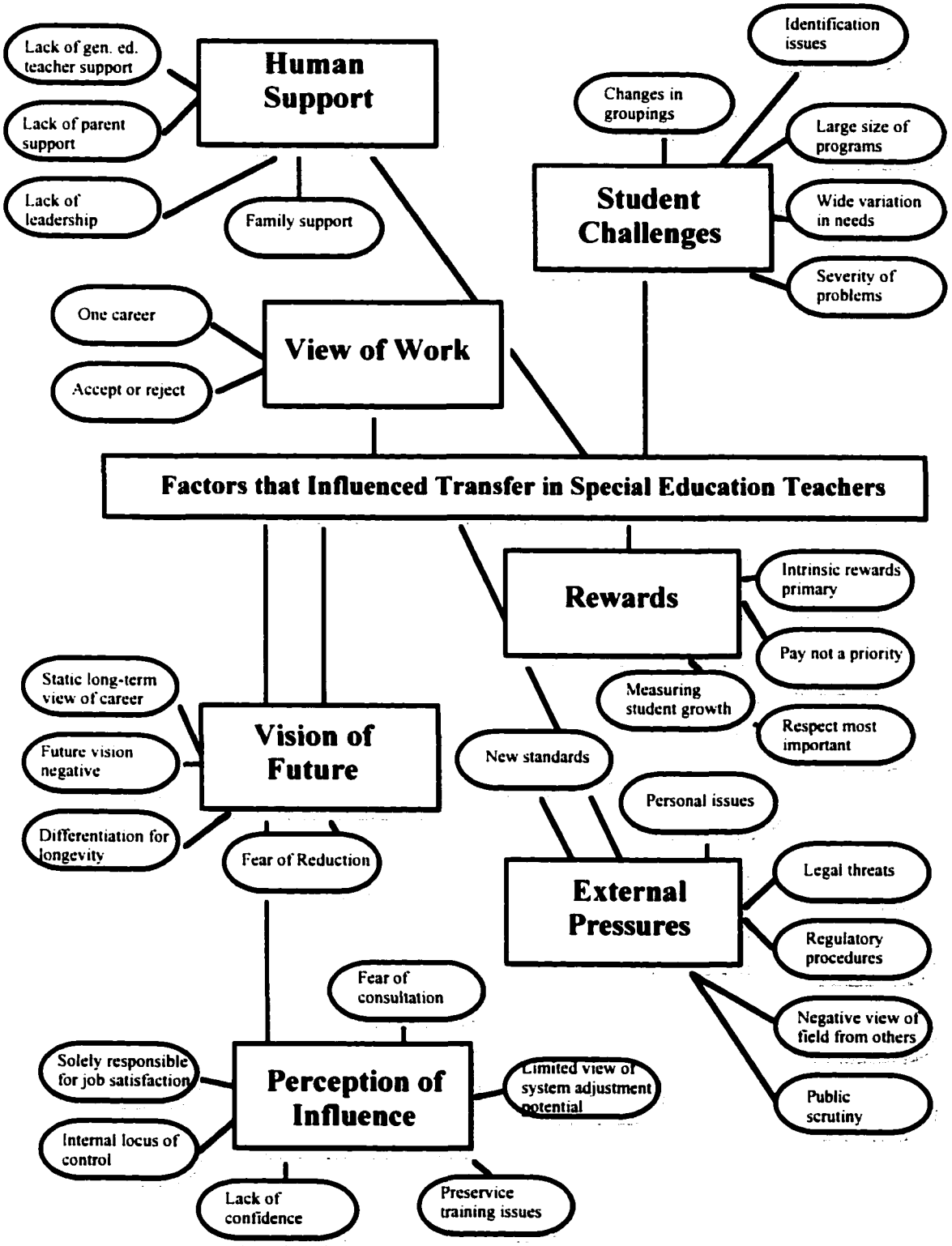

Figure 4. Example of individual thematic map.

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During either the second or third interview the teachers were asked to give a brief definition of the term "job satisfaction" (Appendix B). The teachers were then asked to rate their job satisfaction on a scale of one to nine at the time of each particular event listed on the chart. The points of "satisfaction" were documented on the chart and created a display of the adjustment patterns of each teacher. An example of an Individual Work Adjustment Chart is found in Figure 5 and the individual work adjustment charts can be found in Appendix C.

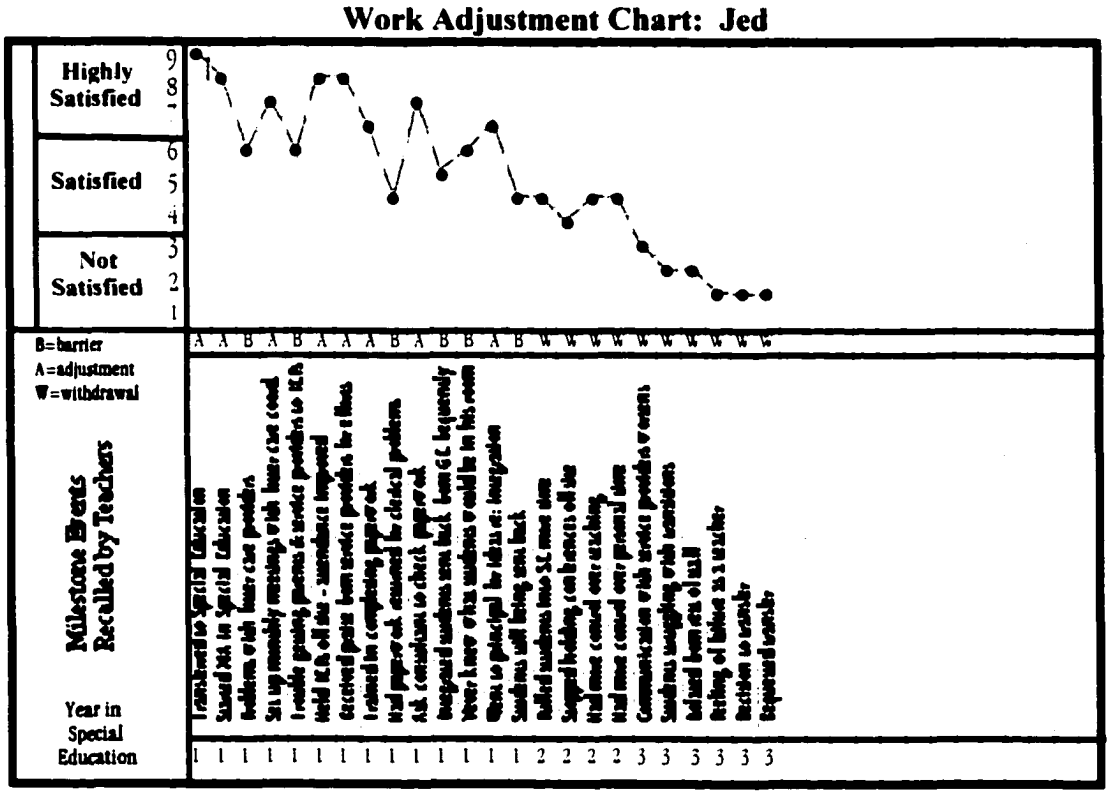

Figure 5. Example of individual work adjustment chart.

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By the end of the interviews each individual teacher's story had been broken down into summarized notes, a thematic map of factors that influenced his or her decision, and an adjustment chart depicting the events that made up his or her personal work adjustment cycle. These tools would later be used to assist in synthesizing the collective meaning of the teachers' stories.

Analysis of Group Data

To organize the collective data from the group of teachers, I used a process similar to the individual analysis of each individual story. The Individual Thematic Maps were cross-referenced to find elements that were common to all of the participants. A new thematic map was then created to reflect those common elements as seen in Figure 6.

The Individual Work Adjustment Charts were then analyzed to find common elements among the events, activities, and actions that led up to the teachers' decisions to leave. The elements were coded using the work adjustment framework as subheadings emerged for similar categories within each portion of the cycle. A combination of the Thematic Map and Work Adjustment Framework were used to organize the collective stories of the teachers and provide a clearer display of the resulting feedback in relationship to the descriptive framework (Figure 7).

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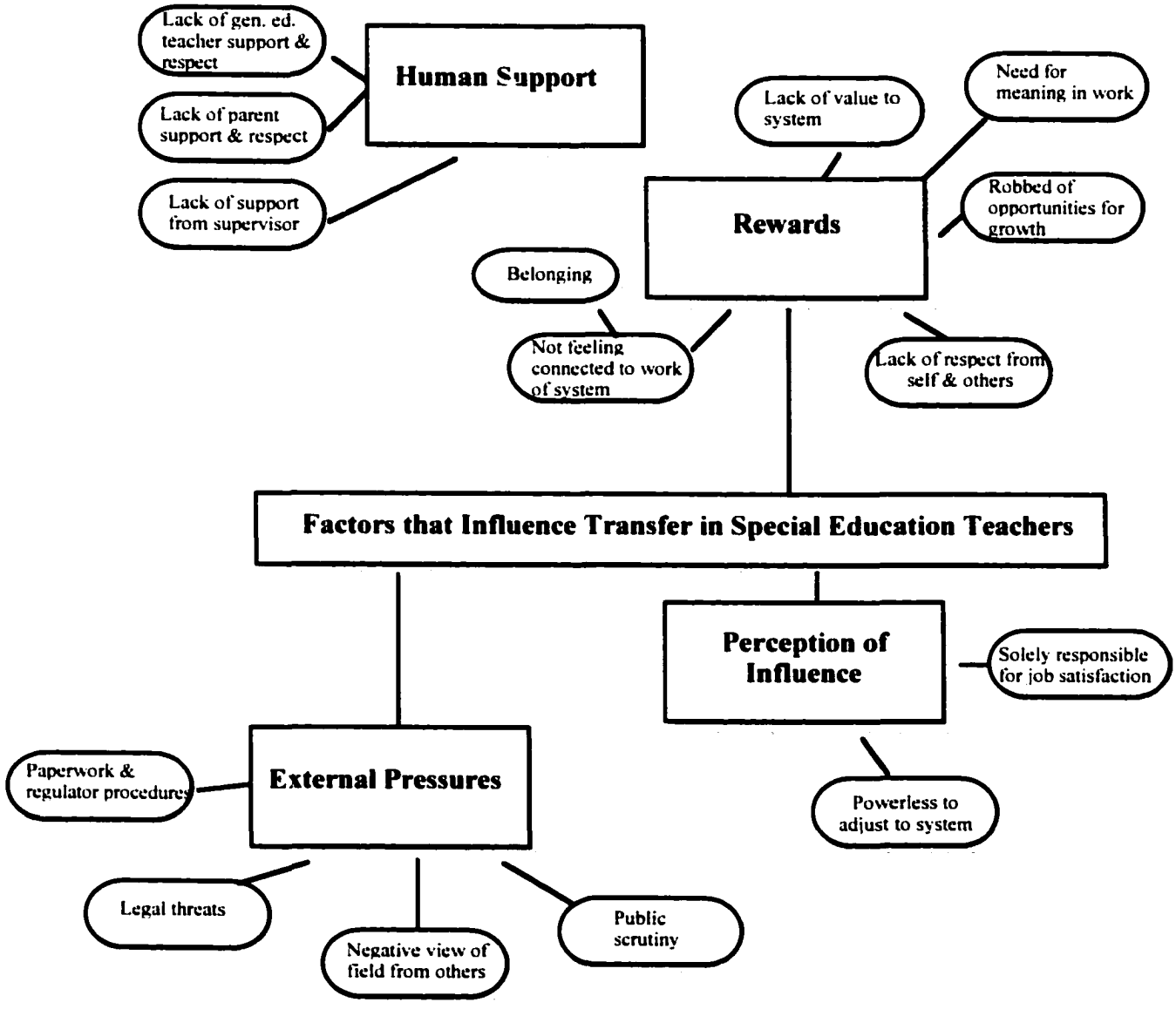

Figure 6. Thematic group map of group factors.

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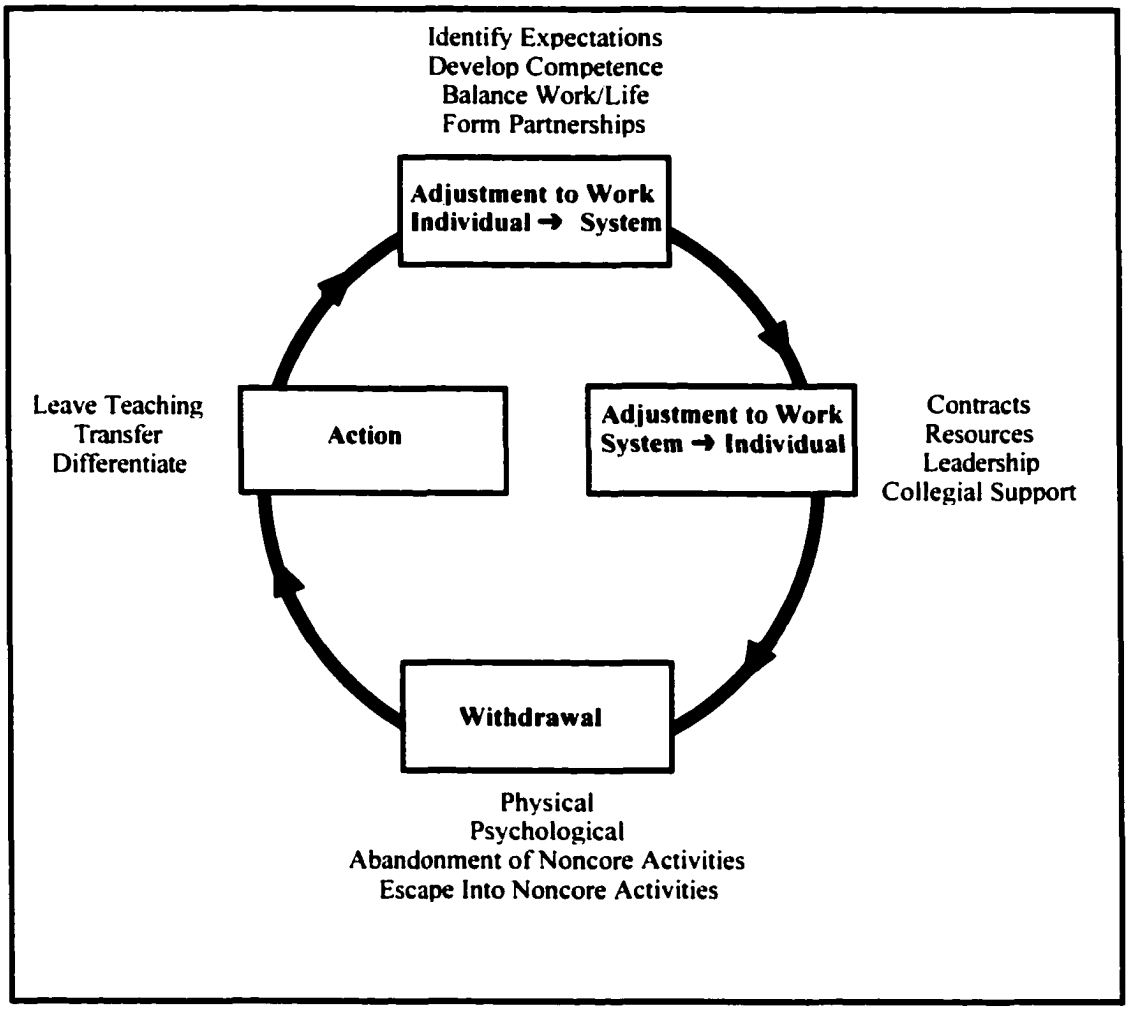

Figure 7. Group work adjustment framework.

The Telling of 12 Teachers' Stories

Chapters III, IV, and V provide a synopsis of three aspects of the 12 teachers' stories. Chapter III reveals the personal context of the stories and illustrates how the teachers came to pursue the field of special education and the depth of their commitment. Chapter IV explores the factors that influenced their decisions to transfer to general

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education and Chapter V examines each teacher's individual work adjustment cycle. In order to effectively provide the unique flavor of each story I have incorporated samples of the language style and vocabulary of each teacher. Some of the conversational language is contained in direct quotes (displayed with quotation marks or in a single spaced block) scattered throughout the text and other examples can be found in sections where I am retelling the stories. The teachers used the term "kids" instead of "students" so often that I have included variations of that term without specific identification as a direct quotation. The teachers also frequently referred to several special education terms used in the state of Iowa that may be unfamiliar to some readers. A brief definition of those terms is included in footnotes.

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CHAPTER III

THE STORYTELLERS: PERSONAL CONTEXT

Introduction

The first piece of each story that rose to the surface (usually during the first interviews) was the personal context of each of the storytellers. These were the individual elements of each teacher that, in combination, formed the foundation for their teaching experiences. It included demographics such as gender, family background, age, generational influences, and educational background (to the degree that the individual saw them as important). It also included elements I saw as interesting or important such as their ways of expressing themselves, levels of enthusiasm, sense of humor, facial expressions, appearance, and body language. A last piece of the personal context puzzle was why and when they decided to become special education teachers. This personal context foundation would later prove to be an integral part of their work adjustment cycle and their final decision to leave the field of special education.

Literature

Special Education Teacher Workforce

Before delving into the personal 12 teachers in this study it is helpful to take a broader look at the literature regarding special educators at a national level. The vast majority of special education teachers in the United States work in the public schools. A higher percentage of them have obtained master's or doctoral degrees than have general education teachers (NICHCY, 1998). Special education teachers make up at least 10% of most teaching faculties in public schools (NICHCY, 1998). Females continue to make up

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the majority of the special education teaching population. Almost 90% of special education teachers at the elementary level are female compared to 87% of general education teachers. At the secondary level 77% of special education teachers are female while only 53% of the general education teacher population is made up of women (NICHCY, 1998). Race does not seem to be a significant factor in teacher attrition, although limited research indicates that African-American educators are slightly more likely to stay in the field (Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999). The ethnic composition of special education teachers and general education teachers is similar, although there is a higher representation of minority students in special education versus general education (NICHCY, 1998). In Brownell and Smith's 1993 study of special education teacher burnout they found that teachers of older students were also more likely to leave the field. Not surprisingly, the many teachers on emergency or temporary certifications also leave at high rates (Brownell & Smith, 1993). On average special education teachers are ten years younger then their counterparts in general education (Brownell & Smith, 1992) and have fewer years of teaching experience (NICHCY, 1998). Unfortunately, teachers under 35 are significantly more likely to leave the field of education (Miller et al., 1999), which puts special education at an increased risk of teacher attrition.

Generational Differences

Today's prospective teachers find themselves in the midst of a career context that is strikingly different from the conditions experienced by the retiring cohort of teachers hired some 30 years ago. At that time, fewer professional opportunities were open to everyone (particularly females), and choosing a lifelong career was the norm. Today's

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teachers have multiple, attractive career options, and they hold different expectations about career mobility and job security (Peske, Liu, Kauffman, Kardos, Moore Johnson, 2001). Much of the changing attitude about work in the United States encompasses the differences between the generations. The current workplace is made up of three different generations. Each generation has their own unique characteristics, shaped by the major events and social shifts that took place within their lifetimes. One of these characteristics deals with how they view the world of work. The three generations currently found in today's organizations are the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, and Generation X.

Silent generation. The Silent Generation is made up of those born between 1925 and 1942. Today the youngest of this generation is in their sixties and for the most part has retired from public education. With regard to work this generation was the last in the "line of command" legacy. They believed in loyalty to the organization and had great respect for formal authority. It was during this generation that terms like "company man" were coined. To the Silent Generation to be the "boss" was a good thing. This generation created schools in the image of the hierarchical private businesses of the time, and teachers and administrators who entered public education stayed in public education. For many females it was one of only a few careers available to women, but all that would change in the next generation.

Baby boomers. Baby Boomers were born between 1943 and 1960 currently making them between forty-two and fifty-nine. The oldest of the Baby Boomers are just beginning to exit public education and the workforce. Those at the younger end of the continuum are into middle age and are (as most people do during middle age) starting to

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take stock of their lives, including their work. This generation came of age during the Vietnam War and saw a counterculture movement take roots from the ground up. Television coverage provided "real time" views of these events and took from this generation any innocence people had regarding their leaders. Authority was no longer something to be revered; it was something to be challenged. Independence became a sought after characteristic for both the teacher and the student and idealism remains a guiding principle for many Boomers. This generation also saw major changes for women. The migration of women into the labor force jumped from 31.5 % in 1960 to almost 60% in 1992 (Conger, 1997). Leadership in this generation changed to a more collaborative, team-based approach. Workers, such as teachers, still looked forward to a single career in a particular field, but their willingness to alter their work and challenge authority made them participate in the leadership of schools at a much greater level.

Generation X. The generation that is currently infiltrating the workplace is known as Generation X. This generation was born between 1961 and 1981 making them between twenty-one and forty-one. These are the children of parents who often both work or of single parents (since this is the time period in which divorce became a household word). In terms of work those of Generation X are willing to work hard, but they insist on maintaining a healthy balance between their work and their personal lives. Their loyalty is to doing mutually satisfying work and not directly to the organization itself. Many of this generation see themselves as independent contractors, seeking jobs that fit their lifestyle and ideals. They also have retained their parents willingness to challenge authority but in a more subtle way. In public education this generation is

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comprised of young teachers at the low end of the continuum and young administrators at the high end. They seek supervisors who are mentors and coaches rather than authoritarian parent figures. Generation X workers also have an entrepreneurial aspect about their work ethic that may cause them to differentiate their work by changing jobs many more times then did the previous generations.

Research findings suggest that retaining the next generation of teachers may be much more difficult than retaining the previous generation. A recent study of current teachers found that the teachers' ambivalence about full-time classroom responsibilities suggests that a uniform, horizontal career with few opportunities for variety and challenge will not be sufficient, even for the group of teachers who hope to teach for the long term (Peske et al., 2001). Although public education tends to lag behind the rest of the professional workforce in following trend lines, it is clear that a quality pool of teachers in the public school system is not a given and is even less likely in the area of special education. These fundamental generational differences are important because they tell us about the expectations and motivations of new teachers, which may be in conflict with those of their Baby Boomer supervisors and colleagues. These factors, in turn, may impact the special educators' decisions to stay in or leave their jobs (Conger, 1997) and how they balance their personal lives with their work lives.

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Personal Context of 12 Teachers

In many ways the personal context of the teachers in this study was similar to the demographics of special educators at a national level and yet each individual had a unique story to tell. I listened to and observed the 12 teachers in an attempt to identify those individual characteristics and also to find common aspects that emerged within the group. In organizing the 12 stories I looked at a number of options. I considered organizing the data by personality, background, number of years in teaching, and school size, but ended up coming back to the generational differences and similarities between the teachers. Almost from the first interviews there was a marked difference in the way the Baby Boomers and Generation X teachers told their stories, their attitudes about their decisions to leave, and their reflections on that process. There was also a less visible but still identifiable difference between the older Generation X participants and the younger Generation X participants. For the purpose of organization the teachers being interviewed eventually fell into three loose groups: the Rookie Group (who taught special education between two and five years consisting of four of the participants), the Intermediate Group (who taught special education between five and eight years, consisting of three of the participants), and the Veteran Group (who stuck it out in special education between 9 and 20 years, consisting of five of the participants).

Group 1: The Rookies

The Rookies were, as the title would suggest, the youngest and least experienced of the groups. They belonged on the younger continuum of Generation X, had the shortest stay in special education, and the fewest attempts at adjusting to the role

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demands of the special education teacher. This group was critical to the study because the teachers provided insight into the how young people in this generation view their work in terms of the expectations of the system versus their personal expectations. This group is currently leaving the field in record numbers often to be replaced by uncertified teachers. While their adjustment cycles tended to be shorter, their recollections were fresh and often tinged with emotionality. They were enthusiastic, charming, and reeked of yet-to-be-tapped potential. There is nothing quite as refreshing as viewing the future of public education through the eyes and hearts of new teachers.

Rose. Rose was the first of the Rookies to be interviewed. At 26 she considered herself beyond the rookie stage but her tanned skin and chartreuse Tommy Hilfiger jeans revealed otherwise. Rose grew up near Chicago, the third of three children, and got her BA at a private college in Iowa. She pursued her master's degree in special education (on the heals of her undergraduate degree) at a nearby university. Her brother is a lawyer in the Chicago area, her sister runs a marketing firm near St. Louis, and her mother is a retired teacher. Just watching Rose sit in a chair made me tired. Her bright red hair usually tied back in a high ponytail bounced frantically as she emoted her defense for leaving special education. As with the rest of the Rookie group it took quite a while for Rose to slow down long enough to realize my intent in listening to her story was not to criticize her for leaving the field of special education. At first her sentences flowed quickly into one another at a speed which was rivaled only by the balletic movements of her flailing hand gestures. She was a ball of fire and watching her took me back to my own Rookie days when everything was extremely serious and undeniably possible.

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When I asked Rose when she first remembered wanting to pursue a career working with kids with disabilities her memories were distinct. While growing up Rose had a neighbor with Downs Syndrome who lived next door. He was a little younger than she and attended a different school. Rose had vivid recollections of her intrigue with his world. She also had distinct memories of the way he and his mother talked about his special education teacher. It was with a kind of reverence saved only for someone who had "life-altering" abilities. At the tender age of ten Rose knew she wanted to be a special education teacher. She, too, wanted to have "life-altering" abilities.

Rose began her teaching career in a special education classroom. She landed a job in large school (at least by Iowa standards) and was so excited about her first teaching assignment she didn't sleep at all during the two months prior to the first day of school (in retrospect my guess is she probably did get *some* sleep, but this description along with her thrashing arm movements gave her memories of the experience great dramatic emphasis). Her classroom was located in a large, brick elementary building that has withstood the ravages of time through periodic renovations awkwardly reflecting the architectural design elements of several eras. Her corner of the system was wedged in a converted first grade classroom that she reluctantly shared with the Title I Reading program. Her students had mild disabilities with eclectic life experiences. Rose still remembered each child by name.

Jed. Each time I would ask Jed to reflect on his years in special education he would begin by silently shaking his head often with his eyes pointed down. A young, athletic man with short, cropped hair and a wardrobe made up mainly of jeans, Dockers,

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and t-shirts (with subtle sports insignias); a slight bald spot at the back of his head was the only telltale sign of age or experience. At 28 he could have easily blended into the crowded halls of any high school or college fraternity. Unlike Rose, Jed sort of "fell into" special education. From his perspective special education found him rather than the other way around. After graduating from a local university Jed planned on teaching social studies at either the high school or middle school level. He wanted to stay in a relatively urban area and applied at several schools only to find that secondary social studies teachers seemed to be in abundance that year. A principal in a well-respected district reassured him that starting out as a substitute would make sense in the overall scheme of finding the job he wanted. Jed wound up spending his first year of teaching as a substitute teacher in an at-risk program. It was apparently of unanimous consensus by all involved that Jed was a natural with challenging kids, to which he agreed (or at least was ultimately convinced). The following year he accepted a position in special education working with students who had mild and moderate disabilities. Simultaneously he made the weekly trek back to his alma mater in pursuit of a master's degree in special education. The challenges that faced him were many but at the time he was sure of what he wanted to do and was undaunted by the stresses of the three years that would lie ahead. The reality was different than the dream, however, and after only three years in a special education classroom Jed transferred to a middle school social studies position.

Grace. At 27 Grace had an air of sophistication beyond her years. Her striking short dark hair was cut in a contemporary geometric shape and she wore small reddish black glasses that made her look as hip as they did smart. Grace was now teaching

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English at the high school level. At the time of the interviews she was introducing her students to the great American writers of the 20th century. Her enthusiasm made me long to reread some of the classics. She seemed truly satisfied and settled in her new position but as she admitted, only time will tell. Three years ago Grace began her teaching career in special education. She got her master's degree immediately following her undergraduate work with majors in English Literature, Reading, and Learning Disabilities (LD). Grace wanted to be a special education teacher as long as she could remember. In retrospect she wasn't sure exactly why. None of her family or friends had a disability but the fact that her mother was a social worker and her father a minister may have had something to do with it. The youngest of three sisters she grew up in a small conservative Roman Catholic town, but none of that showed on her now.

Grace exuded political consciousness. She wore a silver AIDS bracelet on her right wrist and drove a small (very fuel-efficient) car. I imagined Grace would have been perfectly adapted for the turbulent 60s in her leather clogs and peasant skirts and must have felt a little out of place growing up during the Reagan/Bush years. Never the less she had sense of purpose and thoughtfulness about her that made her story all the more interesting. Her disappointment at not sticking with special education was etched across her forehead at every point of the interviews. At a couple of places in her story she welled up and looked as though she might start to cry, but she never did.

Elizabeth. The last of the Rookies was Elizabeth. It had been several years since Liz had left special education. She was now becoming an experienced teacher and celebrated her 30th birthday during the course of the study. Liz taught a couple of years

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of kindergarten before going back to school to become a special education teacher. She has always lived in Iowa and has two siblings who are also teachers in the state. Liz only lasted four years in special education (two in a preschool developmental program and two in an elementary program for students with mild disabilities). The story of that piece of her teaching career revealed a state of passion and fragility as told through anecdotes that were both poignant and hilarious. Her raucous laugh and gregarious nature were tempered only during the telling of why and how she decided to leave the field of special education. Most of the time she seemed intrigued by her own decision-making process, as if it had been someone else's career we were discussing.

Liz had bright blue eyes that were already beginning to crinkle in the corners from a lifetime of continuous smiles and genuine laughter. After seeing pictures of her two rambunctious young boys and grinning husband, I could only imagine the stories that could come out of that corner of her life. On alternate weekends Liz and a couple of friends volunteered at a local food bank and on Monday nights she was a den person for her son's Cub Scout troupe. When she wasn't busy with her family she played the piano and listened to music. Liz was clearly drawn to special education out of an intense desire to help those who most needed it. Her reasons for leaving were less defined, and a little more mysterious.

Group 2: The Intermediates

The Intermediates are made up of three teachers who spent from five to eight years in special education. Their ages varied from 35 to 37 putting them in the older range of Generation X. This group stayed in special education long enough to have

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multiple patterns of work adjustments but no so long that burnout became an issue. All three Intermediates seemed to have a firm grasp on why they left special education. In comparison to the Rookie group they were unapologetic and full of insight into how the state of special education and public education could improve.

Meg. The first of the Intermediates was Margaret. Meg for short. At 38 Meg had seen a bit of the world and had some scars to show for it. Divorced for five years Meg was a single mom who was immersed in the all-absorbing process of raising three children (ages seven, nine, and 12). When I met up with her she had been out of the special education business for about six years and was currently teaching, (and enjoying) 4th grade. Her five-year stint in special education consisted of a variety of experiences with elementary students who had mild disabilities. Meg reflected on those years fondly despite the fact that her personal life was in a shambles at the time. Her extended family was still an important part of her life and she spoke often of her two brothers, three sisters, parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins (many of whom were connected in some way to the work of public education). Her decision to pursue special education rested in several areas, not the least of which had to do with her nephew, who she watched helplessly fight a serious mental illness.

At the time of our meeting Meg was already dreading her fortieth birthday and I got the sense that time had somehow slipped away from her. She usually stumbled into our meetings out of breath and a little late with her long blond curls in a variety of disheveled upsweeps. Always apologetic Meg reenacted the tribulations of her day, which usually culminated with the final debacle that caused her to be late. Of all the

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participants Meg was certainly the most grateful to have a chance to talk about herself and her work, particularly over good food and a nice glass of wine. It was Meg who simply could not complete her story in three interviews so we added a fourth at a local coffee shop.

Becky. Becky had some interesting stories to tell. Growing up in a poor urban environment she struggled with school as an adolescent and (according to her perception) barely graduated from high school. At the urging of a particularly supportive teacher she was the first in her family to go to college where she earned a bachelor's degree in teaching. After one year of teaching in a fifth grade classroom Becky returned to a nearby university to get her special education certification and master's degree. I almost knew before I asked why Becky decided to pursue special education. At 36, despite a solid marriage and job she enjoyed, Becky still carried with her those challenging school years. She wanted to work with struggling students to give them the support she had desperately lacked when she was in school. She saw those struggles as her unique gift to the educational system and so she pursued a degree in special education with an emphasis in behavior disorders. After only one year of teaching, she walked courageously into a classroom with children who had moderate behavior disorders. It was an environment for which she was emotionally unprepared and in a sense could never prepare. Most of her students lived in a residential treatment center and came from all over the state. Despite being overwhelmed by the needs and level of damage done to many of the kids she

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accumulated some delightful, tragic, and amazing experiences during this period of the career. After her seventh year, however, she walked out and returned to a fifth grade classroom.

Mary. The last of the Intermediates is Mary. Mary is now a math teacher. Of all the participants she was the most punctual and thorough in her preparation for the study. By the second interview Mary had mapped out her career in almost three-dimensional detail. The daughter of an engineer and nurse Mary had a very scientific way of looking at her work. It was important for her to get the details *right* before an adequate assessment of her decision to leave special education could be identified. Mary went into special education in part to help investigate why some children seemed to learn more easily than others do. Her master's degree focused on learning disabilities and she had additional training in direct teaching methods in the areas of reading, math, and spelling.

Mary was the picture of a traditional public school teacher. At our meetings she wore neatly tailored sweaters that often had appliquéd decorations relating to the season or an upcoming holiday. These were usually paired with long denim skirts or jumpers (and of course) very sensible shoes. Although I didn't actually observe Mary in her classroom, I imagined she spent a lot of time on her feet tirelessly helping students as they tried to grasp middle school math concepts. She arrived at school by 6:45 every morning and helped students in her room after school. During her preparation period she was often busy as an activity sponsor and spent her weekends antiquing with friends. At 35 Mary lived alone with her two dogs in a Cape Cod house she purchased six years ago. She spoke only sparingly of her family. Her description of the garden in her backyard

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was so vivid I could almost imagine it in my mind. Mary lasted eight years in special education working primarily with students who had learning disabilities.

Group 3: The Veterans

The Veteran Group is made up of five Baby Boomers who stayed in special education from 8 to 20 years. The teachers ranged in age from forty-four to forty-six, putting them in the middle of the Baby Boomer age range. Because these teachers had extensive experience in both special education and general education their stories had more depth and variety of perspective then did the other two groups. This group had been involved in special education since its inception in the late 1970s[1] and had seen a roller coaster of changes in the field as it evolved over time. The memories of the Veterans were less sharp in terms of dates, etc. but more reflective in terms of the importance of milestones. This group provided critical learning about the potential longevity of special education teachers and the potential need for differentiation within the careers of special education teachers. Although these teachers are already mapping out the exact dates on which they will retire, their stories provide great insight into what the next generation of teachers may need to withstand the challenges and rigors of special education.

Joanna. The first of the Veterans is Joanna. At 46, Joanna has been a teacher for over 20 years with 10 of those years in moderate and severe behavior disorder programs (BD). She is an avid runner with smooth muscles that make her seem younger than her years. Her clothes are comfortable and modest with the exception of her new running

[1] PL 94-142 was passed in 1975 and began what we now think of as special education.

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shoes which appear to be top of the line. The mother of two grown children and one in high school Joanna gives off an aura of calmness, as if there are few circumstances that could truly bother her. She left special education in the late nineties but continues to work with challenging students in an at-risk program. Her accounts of the two jobs, however, are in stark contrast to one another.

Joanna knew she wanted to be a teacher at an early age. Her first memories of teaching began as a nine-year-old playing school with her sisters and some neighborhood friends in their garage. Perhaps because she was the oldest (or perhaps as a part of her destiny) Joanna was always the teacher. In her memories nobody else seemed to mind or stepped forward to replace her as the teacher so she assumes her teaching techniques must have been at least strong enough to entertain the six through eight-year-old crowd. After graduating from a local private college she started in her first real classroom during the early eighties at about the time special education was looking for quality teachers. As a middle school reading teacher she had experienced success in working with students who had learning problems, often coupled with emotional, social, and behavioral problems. When her school was considering starting a program for students with behavior disorders, it took little prodding for Joanna to pursue the position and commit to completing a master's degree in special education. For the next ten years she worked with the neediest kids she had ever known. Her stories about those years reveal a range of emotions, passion, and sorrow.

Chuck. Chuck, a 45 year-old jock who looked most comfortable in sweats with a cherry Coke in his hand, was the next Veteran. Chuck grew up in rural Iowa the son of a

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farmer (which may account for his need to wear a baseball cap at all times). His brother Cal was born with Cerebral Palsy. Chuck knew at a very young age that he didn't want to farm. By high school he knew he wanted to teach and coach. His experiences with Cal steered him toward special education and he was the only teacher in the study to receive a bachelor's degree in special education with an emphasis in mental and physical disabilities (in addition to a teaching certificate in physical education). As luck would have it there were no high school openings in that area when he was ready to begin his teaching career so he took a special education job in the area of behavior disorders instead. He remained in that position for nine years, during which time he went back and finished his masters with a behavior disorder teaching certification. Chuck lasted nine years in the BD program, which is well above the average. At the beginning he believed he would retire in the BD position but along the way things began to happen and his expectations of what the job should be were clearly not met. Chuck now spends his days working with high school students in the area of physical education.

Rhonda. The mother of four children ranging in age from 10 to 18 Rhonda was born to be a caretaker. The middle child of seven she grew up, went to high school, and completed college in the same city where she now lives and works. At 44 Ronda had few complaints in her story. She looks at middle age as a new beginning – something to anticipate rather than dread. The interviews gave her an opportunity to self-explore, away from the constant din of her very busy life.

Rhonda reflected positively about her 14 years in special education and was unapologetic about leaving the field. She couldn't remember the exact moment she

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decided to become a special education teacher but she guessed it was as a fairly young age. She described herself as a curious child who was forever dragging wounded animals through her residential neighborhood in an attempt to rescue them from the harsh elements of life (much to the chagrin of her mother and family). She tended to wounded birds and found the rightful owners of lost pets. As she grew into an adolescent Rhonda graduated from animals, turning her attention to humans in need of rescue. In high school Rhonda worked with underprivileged children after school and advocated for the weakest of her peers. She befriended the geeks and outcasts of her class, and given that she still possessed a striking beauty and captivating confidence, I imagined that it was not because she was not cast among them herself.

This seemed to be the perfect background for a teacher of students with mental and physical disabilities. Rhonda began her teaching in a small classroom located in a portable building adjacent to an elementary school. It had several leaks in the roof and conjured up scenes from the Wizard of Oz during wind storms but she painted the inside a robin's egg blue and talked her husband into building shelving around the perimeter. It was cozy and safe for the kids, which was her top priority. The fact that her classroom was ill equipped and completely isolated from the activities at the school didn't seem to bother her. At that time the idea of including students with moderate or severe disabilities in general education classrooms had not yet hatched in the halls of mainstream America and Rhonda accepted the isolation as part of the job. Throughout her teaching career, however, Rhonda saw many swings of the pendulum with regard to the education of students with disabilities. Her experience gave her the history to assess

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each trend and her optimism gave her the tools to put it all in perspective. Special education teachers like Rhonda seem to be a dying breed. It was a great learning experience for me to capture some of that wisdom and experience as she laid out her personal story.

Bev. A tall mostly gray haired woman Bev had been teaching middle school students for over 20 years. As she spoke of her experiences in her eight years as a special education teacher, and of a teaching in general, a slight tiredness infiltrated her voice. Married to a high school teacher for 19 years, the issues of public education were popular dinner and hot tub conversation in the household. She and her husband had one child, a son who was now attending Purdue University. They lived on an acreage outside of town with three horses, six cats, four dogs, and an assortment of chickens.

When I asked Bev to try and remember when she first thought about going into special education there was a long pause in the conversation. She looked as if she was trying desperately to retrieve a misplaced memory that she knew was there, but could not locate on demand. She decided that it was probably in junior high or about that time. Bev explained that she was an incredibly shy child and was overwhelmed by her own adolescence. The absolute newness and uncertainty of being a teenager had been a difficult period for her. Talking about it brought back visibly painful memories. She was quick to say that her family was a great support to her as were many of her teachers, but somehow none of it was enough. Bev spent several years in counseling for depression and although she was forthcoming about the experience, the details of that period were dolled out sparingly. It was obvious that even to a now middle aged professional, the

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almost 30-year-old memories were still fresh and fragile. In summary she concluded she believed the field of special education was her calling and she could sympathize with special education students in a way other teachers might not. She eventually finished her master's degree in reading and learning disabilities. Her first special education position was in a program for students with mild disabilities, mostly learning disabilities. She spoke fondly of many of her experiences in special education but her voice became soft and distant when she remembered trying to advocate for her students with the rest of the staff. "Tiring" was the word she used most often.

Marge. Marge, or Margie as some of her friends called her, was a stout woman with a robust laugh and the mouth of a drunken sailor (as my grandmother used to say when referring to those who punctuated their opinions with colorful, inappropriate language). In our interviews, however, I encouraged the teachers to express themselves in any way they wished and Marge chose to tell her story with both color and a few well placed four letter words. At 46 Marge was single, a great cook, a lover of good books, an avid snowmobiler, and an accomplished line dancer. She remembered years ago thinking that she was a little "BD" herself from time to time and could make the greatest difference in the lives of those particular special education students. She stayed in secondary behavior disorder programs for 20 years, which is an incredible accomplishment in itself.

Marge started teaching reading in her early twenties at the local middle school. Her cubbyhole of a room was sandwiched between the gifted and talented program and the parent volunteer coordinator. She worked with different students each period and was

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not satisfied with the amount of influence she could muster given such brief connections. When she was in her late 20s the high school in her district was starting a program for kids with moderate to severe behavior problems. Marge jumped at the opportunity, signed up in a master's program, and settled in for a 20 year run. A couple of years ago she decided that she had "had it" with special education and decided to apply for an at-risk program position opening up in her district.

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CHAPTER IV

FACTORS OF INFLUENCE

Introduction

The dance between an individual and his or her work is filled with a series of twists and turns. If it is indeed true that work is the way we are identified in the world and how we come to know the world, then it makes sense that this dance is far more complicated than might be first expected. The teachers in this study have had the benefit of hindsight. Most of them were far enough removed from the difficult and emotional aspects of their decisions that they were intrigued by the opportunity to reflect on the process. It is probable that people in the midst of a major work dilemma would find it even more difficult to unravel their decision-making process in the real time in which it was happening. The personal context of this group of teachers (related in Chapter III) told me that their reasons for seeking out a career in special education were deeply rooted in their beliefs, wants, and personal needs (often going back far into childhood). In searching for factors that influenced these teachers' decisions, it was paramount to allow the layers to be broken down naturally over the course of time and to let the teachers tell their stories in a way that made the most sense to them. Prior to the interviews, I reviewed the literature on special education teacher attrition and general factors that influenced special educators to leave the field.

Most of the prior studies that have examined the issue of special education teacher attrition and retention have tended to be "a mile wide and an inch deep." Many of the studies have included large numbers of participants who were usually asked to make

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forced choices on pencil and paper surveys. The results were often similar – a list of familiar dissastisfiers with little in-depth description. Some included open ended comment sections, but even that data were usually quantified in a way that kept it at a more superficial level. In this study I took two approaches. The first was to look at the factors that influenced transfer in special education teachers from a "mile deep" perspective. The second was to view those factors through a work adjustment framework (Chapter V). During the first layer of interviews many of the typical reasons for transfer began to surface. These responses were similar to the current literature base and held no great surprises. It was not until the second interview that surface factors began to deepen and often ended up morphing into entirely different concepts from their more superficial counterparts, diverging from the prior research. At this level I found myself surprised at every turn. After having been in a variety of positions in the special education business for over twenty years, I was hoping for surprises but not really expecting them.

For example, take the issue of "too much paperwork." It surfaced as an influential factor in all the first interviews, much as it did in prior research. This would not come as a surprise to anyone involved in the field of special education. Taken on face value, as it has often been in the past, one would assume the remedy for that barrier would be to lessen the quantity of paperwork. By the second layer interview, however, the context around the issue of paperwork started to drift in a very different direction. As these 12 teachers began to unravel what it was that really bothered them about paperwork, it was not as simple as "too much paperwork" or "unessential paperwork" as I had previously suspected and as prior research would report. In fact, all the teachers

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agreed that the Individual Education Plan (IEP) was a critical part of a student's educational program, and although they admitted IEPs take considerable time and effort, the time or effort of actually completing the IEP process was not the problem. What they hated about paperwork was the disrespectful way in which their work was inspected, and the professional growth opportunities they were denied because they were forced to spend all of their inservice opportunities on what they termed "non-student-change" oriented paperwork technicalities. As I listened to one teacher after another describe this phenomena using different examples but with similar intentions, I realized the value of digging deeper into the surface issues. It illustrated how as the *context* around the factors changed, so did the *implications* for those supporting the retention of such teachers. In the paperwork example, decreasing the quantity of paperwork would no longer make sense as a remedy to the teachers' dissatisfaction. Instead, those trying to increase retention of quality special education teachers would have to look closely at the ways in which paperwork was inspected and at the amount of time used to inservice teachers on what they perceived to be nonessential, nonstudent issues.

As the teachers told their stories I listened and documented the factors they cited that influenced their decisions. Often as the interviews progressed, the teachers would elaborate on something they had said previously, giving it a different or deeper meaning. Sometimes, I would probe on a particular item they had not fully explored. For the purpose of organization, the factors fell into three interconnected areas: human support, external pressures, and job satisfaction.

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Human Support

> I always considered myself a self-directed, kind of do-it-yourself kind of person. I never would have thought *support* would have been a big issue for me. But it really was during those years in special education. I don't think the other teachers ever intended to make me feel alienated, or the principal intended to make me feel like an "add-on," or parents intentionally tried to make me feel incompetent, but they did. I can't really describe all the reasons why, but I felt like a second class citizen a lot of the time that I was in my special ed. class. Maybe it was because the kids felt like second class citizens, and I just became an extension of them in other people eyes, or even in my own eyes. Whatever it was, it made a normally confident person doubt herself to the point of feeling that I needed to get out – one way or another. (Meg)

Human support is something we all need, but most of us have a hard time accepting it or asking for it. All the teachers had some realization going into the field of special education that it was going to be a tough and difficult job. They expected the students' needs would present major challenges but greatly underestimated the barriers they would face with adults. Feelings of incompetence and disrespect surfaced in all the experiences, usually surrounding adult issues. The stories focused mainly on three aspects of adult support: general education teachers and other colleagues, parents, and supervisors.

General Education Teachers and Colleagues Support

One of the themes that emerged immediately from all the teachers was the issue of collegial respect (or more aptly the teachers' perceived lack of collegial respect). The need for respect in one's work is well documented. For people in an organization to do their best work they need to be treated with respect. The respect has to be real, authentic, and consistent and must make all individuals feel that their unique contribution is valued and crucial to the success of the system. What surprised me about this perception was

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that others touted all the teachers as being special educators whom they greatly respected. I knew (either through direct experience or word of mouth) that all of these teachers were considered of high quality and held the respect of their supervisors and peers. Although in the study I was primarily focused only on the perception of the 12 teachers, the incongruent perspectives brought up some interesting questions. What made the 12 special education teachers feel disrespected and often alienated from the system? What behaviors did they perceive as indicating a lack of respect? Did this feeling of not being respected or feeling like a valued part of the system change over time? The answers were both enlightening and surprising.

The Rookies had the most intense feelings about the respect of the general education colleges. Their stories focused on an ongoing struggle to be respected and to feel competent around the rest of the staff. Rose's story exemplified the feeling of alienation that all the Rookies felt during their one to three years in special education, and how that feeling changed when they transferred to general education positions. The Intermediate group had many of the same kinds of feelings, although they showed a bit more resiliency in trying to change the behavior of their colleagues. The Intermediates focused on their feelings of not being taken seriously by colleagues versus the overall feeling of alienation described by the Rookies. Mary's struggle to gain the respect of her peers captured the stories of the Intermediates. The Veterans' stories focused on the factor of fatigue when it came to dealing with their general education counterparts. They spoke of a futile cycle of attempts to build empathy and encourage differentiation for students with their colleagues and the revolving door of recycled initiatives that faced

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them year after year. According to the Veterans, the longer you stayed in special education the more the initiatives all started to look the same. Marge's descriptions set the tone for the struggles of the Veteran group when trying to elicit support from general education colleagues and trying to survive the "new idea of the month club" from those outside the special education teaching ranks.

Rookie perspective. Rose envied the elementary classroom teachers. She watched them from a distance as they met in their grade level teams and talked about the district curriculum and how they would make it their own. She had met a third grade teacher named Jessie at the district orientation. She and Jessie were both first year teachers coming from similar backgrounds. They bonded quickly and shared their hopes, dreams, and worst fears with each other. Now, at the end of the first semester of their rookie year, Rose felt the initial camaraderie slipping away. Jessie was a part of a team, of something real and definable. Her role was laid out for her and all she had to do was put her special mark on it. Rose coveted the identity Jessie was growing – the confidence and comfort level. Not that there wasn't anybody supporting Rose. Rose was assigned a wonderful mentor – a veteran special education teacher with a grandmotherly presence who supported her when she had questions and would have done anything in the world to make her feel comfortable in her job. She had a consultant from the Area Education Agency[2] who stopped by at least once a week to see how Rose was doing, brought her

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materials, and answered her rookie questions. But Jessie had a *team* and Rose was not sure exactly what about that *team* seemed so important, but she knew it was missing from her work. And she somehow knew she would not be the teacher she wanted to be without it.

Intermediate perspective. Mary described her initial experiences with general education teachers with even more intensity. She likened it to a Christian being thrown to the lions. Mary recalled with vivid memories her first interactions with the classroom teachers. She remembered going into a seventh grade teacher's room on a Tuesday morning to talk about the potential integration of one of her students from the special education program. Having taught in the building the year before, Mary thought she had established a pretty good relationship with this teacher. All those illusions were shattered, however when she walked in wearing her special education hat. She remembers being "put in her place" and feeling as if she had stepped into some kind of parallel universe. Unfortunately for Mary, in this universe special education teachers were treated as the enemy, with whom general education teachers never let down their guard. Mary admitted that during her later years of teaching special education it got a little bit better but she never quite shook the feeling of being looked down upon by the rest of the general education staff.

Veteran perspective. Listening to Marge's attempts to enlist the support of the general education staff it was easy to see why someone with so much experience would eventually give up on the system. Marge exuded confidence and it was hard to imagine

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intimidation playing any role in her frustration. Marge was not a person who appeared to be intimidated by anything.

According to this veteran, it was the cycle. She talked about the meetings, and the retreats, and the inservices – all trying to find the perfect way to deliver special education. She remembered it as a search for the Holy Grail of special education models, but of course, there was no Holy Grail of special education models. Marge could have told them that from the beginning, but she reflected that it probably wouldn't have made any difference. They were determined (they being the department heads, consultants from the AEA and Department of Education, principals, counselors and teachers) to find a way to make it easy to integrate students who had a lot of problems with students who didn't. It wasn't that Marge could not see the value of trying new approaches and shaking things up a bit from time to time. She emphasized throughout her story that self-renewal and growth were critical aspects of staying healthy and motivated as a special educator. It was instead, the constant revolving door of external ideas that made Marge and her veteran colleagues crazy, and eventually really, really tired. Not only was she expected to implement these often "half-baked" ideas, it was a rare occurrence when anyone ever asked her what she thought about them. According to Marge, there are a lot of experts out there who parade themselves around as the know-alls and be-alls of special education, but most of them couldn't last a day in a real classroom full of real kids.

Parent Support

Parent support was the next issue to rise to the surface of the teachers' stories. The literature supports that the relationship between special education teachers and

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parents is often strained. This can be caused by a combination of factors, but often boils down to parents trying to advocate their legal rights under a well publicized federal law, and the fact that all students receiving special education have to, by definition, experience significant problems in school. It is reasonable to expect that parents of children experiencing problems in school are more likely to have challenges with the school system, and with individual teachers as well. Again, the Rookies perspective varied from the more experienced teachers, but in the end the lack of parent support was a factor influencing the transfer for all the teachers. Elizabeth's account of her challenges with hostile and intimidating parents illustrates the Rookies perspective, while Becky's frustration in trying to engage the parents in the educational process summed up the Intermediate point of view. The Veteran position was reflected through Bev's experiences in working with parent's who failed to support her when the going got tough.

Rookie perspective. Elizabeth always thought of herself as a person who could get along with just about anybody. She had often been told by others that her interpersonal skills were excellent, and after teaching two years in a kindergarten classroom her relationship skills with parents seemed to be more than competent. After her second year in special education, however, that confidence dwindled. When Elizabeth came back from summer break the building secretary informed her she was getting a new student from out of the area (she was teaching in an early childhood special education classroom). Elizabeth didn't think much about it at the time and asked the secretary to let her know when the student's file arrived. The secretary handed her a blue Post-It-Note with the mother's name and phone number on it and relayed that the

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principal had suggested Elizabeth set up a time to meet with the parents as soon as possible. To a more veteran teacher the urgency of the message might have set off a mental alarm or two, but Elizabeth was oblivious to any signals and indicated to the secretary she would give the parents a call when she got down to her room.

Elizabeth's room was bright and cheery. She had already removed the sheets of butcher paper that covered the shelves and tables in the summer months. The vinyl floor had been buffed clean and showed few traces of the shoe scuffs, green paint stains, and chair leg scratches left by last year's preschoolers. Elizabeth had already hung the Polaroids of the upcoming class on a mustard yellow bulletin board. The beaming grins of young children (two with Downs Syndrome, three with Cerebral Palsy, one with Autism, and one whose disability had yet to be concretely identified) made Elizabeth laugh out loud. Elizabeth made a mental note to herself to make sure to get more film so she could snap a picture of her new student when he arrived. When she called the number on the Post-It-Note a women's voice answered. Elizabeth enthusiastically identified herself as Jason's new teacher. The woman, with a slight edge to her voice, stated curtly that she had been expecting the call and wanted to set up an IEP meeting as soon as possible. The information Elizabeth gleaned from the short conversation indicated that Jason was a four-year-old child who had been diagnosed with a pervasive developmental disorder when he was three. The family was coming from the western part of the state, and Jason had been receiving special education services at the local school. Still oblivious to the challenges that awaited her, Elizabeth compliantly agreed to meet with the parents the next day (although she told the parents that the rest of the IEP

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team would probably not be available until the following week when the teacher inservice days officially began). The mother was insistent that they meet with the team immediately and Elizabeth said she would do her best on such short notice. The next morning a lone school social worker (who happened to pick up her messages the day before) was the only other team member to show up. The parents arrived a little late and Elizabeth welcomed them in. Jason's mother was a fortyish woman who wore a matching sweater set and tailored khaki pants. A pair of designer reading glasses hung around her neck. As it turned out, the man in the suit walking in behind her was not Jason's father, but instead, the family lawyer. Without ever really understanding why, Elizabeth had been ambushed by a family with "baggage." Over the next two years Elizabeth spent countless hours in meetings (with a myriad of people) around a large table in the principal's office. Most of the time Elizabeth felt like *she* was the one on trial, but could never really figure out the charge. Unfortunately, Elizabeth's intimidation came not only at the hand of the family. Well-meaning (but ultimately disrespectful) district, AEA and legal staff seemed to question her every move. Elizabeth felt like she was teaching in a fish bowl, and when she looked out through the glass she saw only the distortions of her former expectations staring back at her.

Intermediate perspective. Becky's limited (one year) experience in an elementary classroom gave her some idea of what to expect from parents, or so she thought. She got a few calls from parents now and then, they almost always showed up during parent activities, and most stayed in touch through notes sent back and forth with the kids. At Christmas time Becky received small but thoughtful gifts from most of the students and a

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few farewell gifts as the school year approached summer vacation. After a month in the special education program (BD) she realized all too clearly that parental support and respect had suddenly become a brand new ball game. Becky had approximately ten students in her program at any one time (although she had many different students in the course of a year because of the high turnover). It didn't take long for Becky to understand that in order to help the students in any meaningful, long-term way she had to also help the parents. At first she approached the challenge head-on with the tenacity of a pit bull. As the years went by, however, the lack of follow-through, disinterest, and defensiveness of the parents began to wear on her. Not that all her parents presented such challenges, but there always seemed to be a steady stream of absent or dysfunctional parents taking up her precious student time. Becky intuitively knew there was no way to avoid it other then to transfer back to general education. In retrospect, she remembered feeling unprepared for that aspect of the job even though she had grown up in less than perfect circumstances herself. Her preservice training hadn't directly dealt with the emotionality and frustration of working with students in these circumstances. She expected the student challenges, and although there were many, for those she felt somewhat prepared.

Another confounding factor that influenced her decision to leave was her inability to coordinate (and at times even to understand) the support services that many of her families received. The support services came and went according to funding streams and seemed to overlap, bouncing off one another most of the time. Becky remembers thinking that not in her wildest dreams could so many (mostly well intentioned) people

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accomplish so little. She spent the first two years of her special education teaching feeling inadequate for not being able to get a handle on the whole system. Eventually she realized that nobody had a handle on it, which was reassuring on the one hand, and very frightening on the other. Now, having moved back to the general education arena, she deals with the occasional upset or dysfunctional parent, but the adjustments she needs to make are doable, and the knot in her stomach that seemed to arrive every Sunday night in preparation for the new work week is just a distant memory.

Veteran perspective. Rhonda was clear regarding what "got to her" about the parents of her special education students – backup. When times got tough for one of her students (either with academics or behavior) the parents rarely backed her up. Some blamed her for the student's lack of success. Some bailed the student out, over and over. Some just ignored her requests for support and looked the other way. Having come from a family where her parents were very involved in a partnership with the teachers, this lack of support and respect took her by surprise. She had envisioned a scenario where the parents and teacher would work side-by-side to create a workable plan for the student, but that just didn't materialize. She was willing to work long hours to prepare lessons for her students and could put up with most of what the students could dish out. The anxiety and fatigue of trying to keep the parents happy, however, proved to be too overwhelming. Because of her many years in special education and teaching in general, Rhonda had obviously given a lot of thought to these issues. She came to the conclusion that somehow, along the way of trying to provide every student with a disability a "free and appropriate education," special education parents were made to feel that their disabled

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child's educational program was solely *their* responsibility, while the responsibility for the education of their nondisabled children rested in the hands of the school. Rhonda had always been a great supporter of parent involvement and advocacy, but she speculated that somehow those very noble concepts got twisted as they were applied over time. Rhonda admitted she was actually quite popular with most of her parents, and her confidence and interpersonal skills probably allowed her to be more successful than most special education teachers, but she still cited relationships with parents as part of what influenced her decision to leave the field. Rhonda always felt that the pressure was there. Even when the parents were smiling, a little voice told her dissatisfaction was lurking around the next corner.

Leadership Support

The perceptions of the teachers regarding their supervisors were among the most interesting in the study. The literature that exists on the relationship between supervisors with regard to teacher satisfaction is broad in nature. Research indicates that, at least on some levels administrators create a context that influences the job satisfaction of teachers (Bass, 1990; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Vogt & Murrell, 1990). It explains how administrators can influence the quality of interactions among staff, teachers' feelings of being valued for their work, and the sense of substantive involvement in the operation of the school (Darling-Hammond, 1995). There is also evidence to suggest that increased "administrivia," such as paperwork and tasks teachers perceive to be non-substantive, can result in withdrawal from participation, or in extreme cases, leaving the profession (Albert & Levine, 1988; Ma & MacMillan, 1999). Some studies have concluded that

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principals who are termed open and who try to reduce frustrations like paperwork and unnecessary tasks contribute to teacher satisfaction, although the research is not conclusive (Blase & Roberts, 1994). Several authors have speculated that leadership plays an important role in creating an empowering environment, one that is positive, motivating, and promotes self-determination and self-efficacy (Bass, 1990; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Vogt & Murrell, 1990). The literature does not, however, address the aspect of communication between teacher and supervisor and how improved communication could serve as a tool for increasing work satisfaction. In this study the teachers' perceptions of their communications with principals and other supervisors proved to be an interesting detail. All three of the groups had similar stories about the support they received from their supervisors and how (in their perception) the support was *not* directed at improving their job satisfaction. Jed illustrated the Rookie and Intermediate perspective of not feeling comfortable with the amount of support received from the principal and not feeling the principal really knew what was going on in the program. The Rookies were also unsure of what to expect from their supervisor and did not feel the principal ever really inquired about their job satisfaction. The Veterans had similar communication issues with their supervisors but they were more pointed about the lack of involvement of principals in their programs.

Rookie and intermediate perspective. Jed wasn't exactly sure what to expect from his principal. The principal was supportive of his abilities and Jed liked and admired him on a personal level. He was unsure, however, of how much support a special educator could expect from a principal. In defense of his principal Jed pointed out that not very

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many principals actually have special education experience, and that his did not. He also noted that a lot of things happen in a special education room every day, particularly with behavior problems. Jed wasn't sure how a principal *could* effectively support a special education teacher considering the chaos that was usually going on. Despite these acknowledgments, Jed reflected that he needed more support from the principal when he was in special education. He remembered having a lot of people from the AEA around to help him with "technical stuff," which was helpful, but he was never quite sure how the principal thought things were going or how he was doing as a teacher. A consultant once told him that principals usually thought of "no news is good news" when it came to special education. She told him to take it as a compliment if he didn't see much of the principal.

Despite that advice Jed remembered feeling uneasy about the fact the principal rarely stepped foot through the door of his classroom, and most of the interactions he had with him tended to be about student behavior problems or parent conflicts. He rarely talked to the principal about anything positive that was happening because the negative things were always more urgent and needed to be taken of as soon as possible. Jed couldn't help but notice that the teachers he hung around with who were teaching general education classes didn't seem to have these insecurities. When I asked Jed if he went to the principal when his job satisfaction got poor enough that he was thinking about leaving. He responded by saying he believed his principal never indicated an interest in his job satisfaction. When I probed further and asked whether or not the principal ever inquired about "how he was doing" or "how things were going." Jed said the principal

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always asked questions like those, but Jed assumed those questions were in reference to his job *performance* or his students' *performance*, not his job satisfaction. This possible miscommunication would later be echoed in some way by each of the teachers.

Veteran perspective. The Veteran perspective was similar in many ways to the other two groups when it came to their feelings about the support they received from their supervisors. Chuck's memories were similar to the others in the Veteran group. At first Chuck, like Jed, was unsure of exactly how much support to expect from his principal. He did, after all, have a lot of support staff available to him who were not readily available to other teachers, and he was appreciative of that support. In retrospect, however, it was not enough. He needed more support from the principal, and he believed that the other special education teachers in his building did also. It was not so much that he had *more* support when he transferred to general education, it was that he *needed* less. He was clear that comparing the need for support of a physical education program and a BD class was like comparing apples to oranges. Chuck (like all of the teachers in the study) liked his principal and was sympathetic about the overwhelming duties of principal's job. Despite his empathy, however, Chuck couldn't help also observing the revolving door in special education as teachers came into and left his department. Out of ten teachers in the department, he recalled an average annual turnover of at least a third of the department, many of those teachers transferring to general education. The response of his principal to the revolving door seemed to be – let the good teachers go to general education (at least we can keep them in the system) and find as many new hires as possible. In Chuck's mind the issue of support for special education teachers was left

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up to others like department heads, consultants from the AEA, etc. That attitude only reinforced the special educators' feelings they were not a "real" part of the system. Chuck freely admitted that when he began to think of getting out of special education he did not let the principal know how he was feeling. Chuck somehow felt the principal had no influence or even interest in improving his job satisfaction. So instead of sharing his job dissatisfaction with his supervisor, he shared it with friends or family outside the system (who, of course, did not have any influence in changing the system). As with the Rookie and Intermediate Groups, Chuck and the Veterans waited until they had made a final and intractable decision before they went to their principals to ask for a transfer. In all 12 cases the principal or direct supervisor tried to talk the teachers out of their decisions, but in all 12 cases it was too late.

External Pressures

> You know... there are a lot of things about teaching special education that make it an innately hard job. Working with kids who are struggling day after day is just plain hard, and to a certain extent you know that going in. You may not know exactly what the kids are going to be like, but you pretty much know it's going to be hard work. The reason the hardness doesn't scare you away in the first place is you also know there will be rewards, and the rewards will make the challenges worthwhile. What kills you off is not the kids, it's all the crap. I'd go to faculty meetings where some "suit" was telling the entire faculty special education was out of control and was going to bankrupt the entire public education system. That makes you feel real proud now doesn't it? And then there are these IEP Nazis with their over-inflated egos. Fill out this form. Sit through this mandatory training session. Take one step forward and two steps back. The saddest thing is there's so much to learn about kids with disabilities. New treatments and interventions are coming out all the time, but as a special education teacher I never had time to stay on top of any of them because I was too busy trying to placate the IEP Nazis over stuff that had nothing to do with learning or teaching or kids. I think the straw that broke the camel's back for me was when I had to listen to yet another new consultant at the Department of Education trying to convince a group of veteran teachers if they would just take more time and word their transition goals "just right" the world as we know it would suddenly become a better place

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> for all of humanity. There's a point where you feel like you are going to snap and strangle these people. I'm not kidding. A couple of times I almost jumped across the table and strangled this woman. That's when I knew it was time to get out. It was transfer, or accept a life sentence in a maximum-security prison because you murdered one of the IEP Nazis. (Marge)

In the literature special education teachers cite many external barriers in their ability to be effective and satisfied in the field of special education including excessive paperwork and regulatory procedures (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Council for Exceptional Children, 1998), overwhelming caseloads and class size, inadequate resources (NICHCY, 1998), and incomplete preparation (Billingsley, 1993). The role of the special educator has also changed over the last 25 years creating issues of role ambiguity for many special educators. External pressures have forced the special education teacher to play many roles that continue to evolve as public policy and sentiments about the education of students with disabilities continue to vacillate. Prior research indicates that problems with role conflict and role ambiguity have been a source of stress and dissatisfaction for special educators (Council for Exceptional Children, 1998; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982). In one study special educators reported significantly higher levels of role conflict and ambiguity than did general educators (Billingsley & Cross, 1992), although there is little specific research on the causes of the role conflicts (Billingsley, 1993).

The impact of sociological and educational influences surrounding inclusion has greatly impacted the expectations for special educators in the last decade. Special educators need to be as skilled in consultation and conflict management as they are in providing instruction. Some of the skills needed by special educators parallel those

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needed by all teachers. They must be skilled instructional leaders and must be able to productively communicate with parents and the public. They also, however, have additional challenges including having to collaborate with general education teachers, establishing quasi-supervisory relationships with paraprofessionals, developing and implementing IEPs, ensuring procedural safeguards, and working in isolation (Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992).

In this study the teachers cited the external barriers of paperwork and regulatory procedures, but they talked about them as influential in their decisions to leave only because of the disrespect with which they were treated (not due to excessiveness in general). They also described their frustration at giving up what seemed to be almost all of their professional growth opportunities for mandatory training sessions that rarely dealt with student needs. Caseloads and class sizes did surface as frustrations throughout the stories but not on the level that they were causal factors in the teacher decisions to leave the field. Inadequate resources did not surface as influential factors other than the human support issues referred to in the previous section. Finally, although the 12 teachers in the study did indicate feeling unprepared for certain aspects of their roles, incomplete preparation in terms of preservice training was not considered an influential factor.

Paperwork, Regulatory Procedures, and Negative View of Field

One of the influential barriers that surfaced in the stories of the 12 teachers was external pressure. The first external pressure consisted of paperwork, regulatory procedures, and legal threats. All the teachers touched on some of the same issues, but

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the three groups emphasized those things with slightly different intensity. The second consisted of the negative external view of special education by others. In the first category Grace's story captured the Rookies' feelings of intimidation and being overwhelmed by all of the external procedures. She also captured the sense of failure that slowly grew within the Rookie group as they were continually confronted with negative images of the field for which they had so painstakingly prepared. Meg described the Intermediates' frustration at continually chasing the "right" way to do things, only to find that the right way had changed or nobody agreed what the right way was. She also captured the disappointment of all the teachers at not being able to use the time allotted for professional growth for anything but paperwork and regulatory issues. Meg also illustrated a frustration with the constant negative barrage about special education number increases, an issue that was felt by all the groups. Finally, the Veteran perspective of resentment toward the regulators' approach at monitoring the procedures was summed up by Joanna's experiences. She also described how the devaluation of special education by others eventually rubbed off on the special educators themselves.

Rookie perspective. Grace was typical of the Rookies. In her master's program she had written more then a few IEPs and her instructors had spent considerable time discussing the intent of the IEP and its importance to the educational program of the students. Grace bought it all. It made perfect sense to her that an individualized approach would be the ideal way to deliver any educational program. She showed up two weeks before the official teacher workshop during her first year in special education. Dressed in summer cutoffs and Birkenstocks she remembered having each IEP and

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student file in neat piles spread across every table in the room. Grace went through them one by one jotting down notes and adding little yellow stickers to keep track of anything she questioned. She was idealistic about the intent of the public law that funded and protected the education of students with disabilities. Her ideals were a flutter, and she was ready to put them into action with her new kids and families.

When the year got rolling, however, her idealistic vision of the law and the process of creating individual programs for students began to hit a few potholes. Her initial indoctrination into the bureaucracy of special education came when she received a file for a new student that seemed to contain some conflicting dates regarding a couple of key meeting and evaluation times. Being a "take charge" new teacher she called the former school, talked to the counselor, and straightened out the mix-up. Figuring out the error, which appeared to be clerical in nature, Grace innocently crossed out the incorrect date on several documents and inserted the correction. It seemed simple enough at the time. Little did she know that her actions were the equivalent of lighting a match in a national forest during the driest month of the year. The bureaucratic forest fire that ensued *literally* took eight months to undo. First came the gentle inquisition from her consultant, who was careful not to make too big a deal out of the matter lest another rookie special education teacher might be headed out the door. That was relatively painless. Grace explained the mix-up and what she had done while the consultant stared at her like a deer in the headlights. The consultant assured her that she would take care of it, but told Grace not to be surprised if it came up as a mismatch on the AEA computer system.

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A few weeks later Grace received a call from the district administration inquiring about a problem with a new student's last three-year reevaluation date. This time when Grace tried to explain what had happened the gravelly voice at the other end of the phone was not so understanding. Grace was instructed to "fix the problem" (which of course Grace thought she already had done) before the "count date."[3] Dazed and confused Grace made yet another near fatal error. She called the management information system number at the AEA thinking there must be some simple way to change the date on the computer and stop this forest fire before it did any more damage. She knew she needed to do it all before the "count date," which was even more intimidating since she didn't know what the count date was, but by the way the term was being tossed about she was quite sure she *should* have known. As it turned out, calling the AEA set off what Grace visualized at the time as a series of red alerts (perhaps even complete with blaring sirens). "RED ALERT. RED ALERT. STUPID ROOKIE TEACHER ON THE LOOSE WITH WRONG DATES. WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE." Eventually it was decided by four administrators with doctorates, six support staff with master's degrees and three clerical workers with no background in education at all, that the dates could not be changed and that Grace would simply have to redo the evaluation before it really needed to done. Out of confusion and exhaustion Grace did what she was told.

In reality it may not have been quite that dramatic (there really aren't sirens and flashing red lights that go off at the management information system) but to Grace and the other rookies these ordeals seemed humiliating and overwhelming. The consultant

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[3] The funding formula in Iowa uses one day of the year to track student placements.

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was, of course, extremely apologetic and asked for Grace's forgiveness on behalf of the entire chaotic, bureaucratic circus. And Grace, being the benevolent sort of person she is, said it was "all right." In retrospect, however, it really wasn't all right. This wasn't the last paperwork snafu that would cross Grace's path in her two-year tenure in special education, and each would make a lasting impression.

Another influential factor about which Grace spoke with great emotion was the negative view of special education by others. Grace vividly remembered one of the initial faculty meetings she attended as a new special educator. There were several items on the agenda and (in line with her conscientious nature) Grace was one of the few teachers actually prepared to take notes. About half way into the meeting one of the district administrators rose to share some district insights. The second point he made dealt with the increasing special education numbers in the district. He was speaking using an overhead projector. A piece of paper concealed the points yet to come. As he began his tirade on the increase of special education numbers the paper slid down to reveal the second bulleted item: SPECIAL EDUCATION IS A TRAIN WRECK WAITING TO HAPPEN. He went on to describe the "out-of-control train" of special education and showed data that indicated at this rate almost every child in the district would be put in special education by the year 2020. Grace really didn't hear much after the train wreck metaphor. She wrote the sentence in bold letters on her notepad and ended it with an exclamation point. She even remembered the color of ink she was using, a kind of chartreuse like green in a felt tip marker. Grace was insightful enough to grasp the overall intent of the administrator. She knew his comments were really not directed

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at her or the other special education teachers, but the visualization of being on a runaway train that was doomed to crash stuck with her. It is not exactly how she imagined her new chosen work being described during those long nights driving back and forth to the university twice a week while trying to complete her master's degree.

Intermediate perspective. Meg (who lasted a whole five years in special education) demonstrated less intimidation at the paperwork, regulatory procedures, and negative views of special education than did the Rookies, but she showed far more frustration. Meg had been teaching for several years before she entered into the special education ranks. She was aware of the horror stories about the endless paperwork and oversight procedures built around it, but Meg figured with her organizational skills and experience it wouldn't be a huge problem. What drove Meg (and the other Intermediates) crazy was what her department irreverently called the "floating target" syndrome. In Meg's mind there were probably a lot of ways to write a good student goal and productively measure it. There were also many different but equally effective ways to build a quality educational program around those goals. All Meg wanted to know from the people who continually sent back her paperwork for correction was which way was the "right" way. At that point she was willing to be compliant but was having trouble getting a straight answer from anyone as to what was the right answer. Occasionally, she even got a different "right" answer from every one she asked. Her mentor (a master special education teacher) confirmed that her frustrations were to be expected and, unfortunately, it just seemed to come with the job. The mentor explained that even when the department thought they figured out what the right answer was it changed the next

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year accompanied by a new set of forms and flowcharts. During the first two years of her special education teaching experience Meg begrudgingly accepted this anomaly of her new job and focused on figuring out her student's needs, which were extensive and diverse.

By the third year, however, it really started to annoy her. She saw her own frustration reflected in her consultant's eyes as they were summoned to yet another inservice on how to write an IEP using form #1,238B (which was only slightly different from form #1,238A). No matter what the form number or task, she saw no relevance to it and student learning. These were in Meg's mind, "nonkid" issues, which particularly frustrated Meg because she had *real* kid issues with which she was trying to deal on a daily basis. Meg had students with Asperger Syndrome, hearing impairments, depressive disorders, and one with a newly diagnosed generalized anxiety disorder. These were all areas with which she was only vaguely familiar and desperately needed opportunities to gain expertise. Instead, she spent her early dismissal days sitting in a gray room at the AEA watching someone tediously point to boxes on a form, and this seemed to happen year after year. Meg insisted repeatedly that it wasn't the paperwork itself, or even the quantity of the paperwork that got to her. What really got to her was the lack of respect with which she was treated in terms of trying to get a common answer on how to do it "right," and in how the bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo robbed her of the professional growth time she so desperately needed to meet student needs. In these respects paperwork and

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regulatory procedures were influential in Meg's (and the other teachers') decision to leave the field, and although Meg admitted that there is some amount of bureaucracy in her current general education teaching position, it can not even be compared to that found in the field of special education.

Another external pressure that influenced Meg was the constant negative barrage of communication regarding special education by the district, local news media, and national media. Meg remembers picking up a magazine with a cover picturing a child in a wheelchair with an airplane in the background. The caption read, "Taxpayers Paying $100,000 Dollars a Year to Educate Special Education Student." That same week she opened her education association newsletter to a byline that read, "Are teachers in grave danger because we can't expel special education students?" At the time it seemed like everywhere Meg turned someone was portraying a negative view of special education. Sometimes it focused on the local district deficit, other times on over-identification, and occasionally on the lack of accountability for student learning in special education. At lunch another teacher would ask her about a news report they had seen the night before on TV. "What do you think?" "What should we do about special education?" Meg was frustrated and tired by the negative questions. She was doing an unbelievably difficult job for which she had sacrificed precious personal time and money to earn an advanced degree, but know one ever seemed to have questions or comments about that.

Veteran perspective. Joanna's story represented the perspective of the Veterans. Because the Veterans had lived through many cycles of special education trends and several revisions to the special education law, they were well past feelings of intimidation

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when it came to the regulatory procedures. Their frustrations had moved to "down right resentment." Joanna remembered her futile attempts as a young special educator trying to fill out every form correctly, meet every deadline with room to spare, and comply with every legal guideline to the letter. In her first five years of teaching experience Joanna was convinced that the law changed annually (at least that is how it seemed to her). Every year (sometimes even within a school year) she would get a memo from the special education director or someone at the AEA describing a new form or change in procedure. At the beginning she naively believed these were all legislative changes and wondered how the federal government ever had enough time to deal with anything other than special education. Eventually she realized that changes in the law were rare. What did change quite frequently were people's interpretations of the law and rules at the local, AEA, state and federal level. The "Feds" (as she had heard them called) came in to the state and did compliance reviews every few years, recommending changes and citing areas of noncompliance with the law. The state then came in and reviewed the AEAs, recommending changes and citing areas of noncompliance with the law. Finally the AEAs did compliance reviews of the districts, etc., etc., and eventually the changes ended up in Joanna's lap, often with little explanation of how they got there.

Joanna reflected that one of the things she most disliked about being a special educator was the arrogance of those who set procedures and made changes. She remembers a kind of unspoken rule that teachers are "too busy" to understand the legal implications of changes that need to be made and, instead, they should be told exactly what to do. Joanna always interpreted this unspoken rule to really mean that teachers are

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too stupid or undereducated to understand why they are asked to do things. It amused Joanna that these were the same people who spent their spare time in leadership workshops about how to create change in organizations. In her mind it didn't take an organizational theory expert to realize if you ask people to make changes for which they have no understanding, you are not likely to get the results you want. That is exactly what Joanna observed most often. The "paper people" (as she called them) were dismayed when the new teachers made mistakes in procedures and the experienced teachers simply ignored most of what they were supposed to do. She believed it was all fairly predictable if you looked at it from a distance. The paper people were concerned about changes on paper and the teachers were concerned about changes in kids. It did not surprise Joanna that the two groups eventually ended up in a superficial power struggle with no win-win solutions in sight. As a Veteran Joanna learned to ignore most of it but she admits that it influenced her to eventually move to an at-risk position where the kids were much the same but the bureaucratic baggage was significantly less.

The issue of negative image also surfaced within the Veteran group. Like the Rookies and Intermediates, the Veterans were bothered by what they read and heard about special education from a district level and from the media. In addition they added another caveat to the negativity issue. Joanna remembers when she first started teaching in the special education program at the middle school level. At the time it was traditional for students with this level of need to be fairly self-contained in the special education classroom. During the early nineties, however, Joanna remembers a shift in attitude as the concept of inclusion began to be internalized at a local building level. There was now

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an expectation that these students would spend at least part of their day with general education peers. The specials teachers took the brunt of it at first, and then inclusion started creeping into the lives of the content teachers. At the time, and even now, Joanna had mixed emotions about when and how students with disabilities were included in general education classes. She supported the overall philosophy but saw some definite problems in implementation strategies. From Joanna's perspective it became kind of a crusade. Special education experts (usually employed outside of schools) were parading "included" kids in wheelchairs and kids with developmental disabilities in and out of workshops, on videos, and in monthly newsletters. It began mostly at the preschool and elementary levels, and over time it appeared with lesser enthusiasm at Joanna's middle school. Joanna couldn't help but notice that many of the inclusion poster children had parents who were well-educated, white, and upper middle class. None of the parade leaders ever stopped by the BD room to see whether her kids should be included in the parade. At the time she thought it was probably consensus that BD kids could hurt the "movement' and wouldn't make for good media.

Eventually, however, the powers-that-be even began questioning the restrictiveness of the BD students, and there became an expectation that these students should also spend time in the general education population whenever possible. Early on in her teaching she realized that isolating kids with serious behavioral and emotional problems was not entirely in their best interest, and at the beginning she was a strong advocate for the inclusion of BD students. It was not an easy or pleasant task, however, to tell a 7th grade science teacher that a verbally aggressive and potentially violent

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student from her class would be joining the group soon. The teacher would, of course, shoot the messenger rather than the message, who as it turned out was Joanna. There were always a lot of conflicting interests. Parents and advocates wanted the students with disabilities included, with their only interest being the student with the disability. Principals and district administrators wanted the special educators to look into their crystal balls and guarantee that the students in question would not disrupt instruction or cause harm to the general population of students (which was easier said than done), and general education teachers had the interest of their content and classroom climate to protect. Joanna remembered feeling like it was a no-win situation for her and often a losing battle for her kids. Even though she truly believed in the idea of inclusion, Joanna admitted that it was easier to spend all day cooped up with a group of students with behavior disorders then it was to deal with the wrath of the adults looking out for conflicting interests. It was as if the negative challenges posed by the students inadvertently rubbed off on their special education teachers in the minds of others. Joanna remembers her fatigue level as extremely high and eventually knew she was loosing her ability to be the kind of advocate her students really needed.

Rewards and Job Satisfaction

The concept of rewards is a theme that provides the foundation for the stories of each of the 12 teachers. Work rewards are those things needed to maintain adequate job satisfaction. Some of those rewards are tangible in nature such as pay, job tenure, etc. Others are rooted in basic human needs such as respect, a feeling of belongingness, and the ability to grow as a professional. In the complex context of work it is often difficult

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to distinguish among specific rewards, since the rewards we receive from our work are interdependent and connected. The literature on job satisfaction is vast, and although job satisfaction often varies with the job, there are many universal themes in the research and literature that are pertinent to work in general.

Job satisfaction became a core issue in the current inquiry and has an extensive literature base. There are probably as many definitions of job satisfaction as there are different kinds of jobs. As the director of Harvard's Program on Technology, Public Policy, and Human Development, Michael Maccoby looks at job satisfaction from a life sustenance perspective:

> Work ties us to a real world that tells us whether or not our ideas and visions make sense; it demands that we discipline our talents and master our impulses. To realize our potentialities, we must focus them in a way that relates us to the human community. We need to feel needed. And to feel needed, we must be evaluated by others in whatever coinage, tangible or not, culture employs. Our sense of dignity and self-worth depends on being recognized by other through our work. Without work, we deteriorate. We need to work. (1988, p. 51)

In the field of education, research tends to define job satisfaction as the degree to which an individual identifies with the organization or school (Shaw & Rayes, 1992; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1996), an individual's perceived ability to positively contribute to the organization (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Glisson & Durrick, 1988), and the extent to which the organizational culture positively impacts an individual's perceived value (Dalla Costa, 1995; Senge, 1990). In this study the 12 teachers were allowed to give their own definition of job satisfaction to remove any confusion over what the term meant. The two most widely recognized theories of job satisfaction are attributed to Maslow (1970) and Herzberg (1966). Maslow's work is well known and focused on what has commonly

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been referred to as a hierarchy of needs based on the premise that lower order needs (physiological, security, and belongingness) must be satisfied before individuals can meet their higher order needs (esteem and self-actualization). This model presumes that if a lower order need is not satisfied it preoccupies the individual and inhibits attention to higher order needs. In theory then, individual behavior is motivated by a desire to satisfy the need that is most important at a specific point or period in time. Maslow asserts that for most individuals lower order needs are regularly satisfied and higher order needs are less likely to be satisfied. While there is some flexibility in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it is still a hierarchy and cannot pragmatically account for all the changes in job satisfaction of highly educated and skilled workers such as teachers. It does however, offer insight into the types of job satisfaction that special education teachers may face within the context of their assignments.

Herzberg's (1966) two-factor theory of job satisfaction posited that one set of rewards contributes to job satisfaction, and another set of rewards contributes to job dissatisfaction. The satisfiers are often called motivators and include factors such as achievement, recognition, the work itself, and responsibility. Dissatisfiers (also called hygienes) include interpersonal relations, working conditions, and personal life. Herzberg believed that certain factors increase an individual's job satisfaction, but that the absence of those same factors does not necessarily produce job dissatisfaction. In other words individuals could be satisfied and dissatisfied with their jobs at the same time. Herzberg's theory is broad and open to interpretation and allows greater explanation for the complexities in exploring the area of teacher job satisfaction.

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There is ample evidence to reason that job satisfaction plays an important factor in whether or not teachers will stay in their positions or within the field (Hirschman, 1970; Randall, Fedor, & Longenecker, 1990). Hoy and Miskel (1991) characterize job satisfaction as, "a present-and past-oriented affective state of like or dislike that results when an educator evaluates her or his work role" (p. 392). The literature on special education teacher attrition and retention indicates a strong relationship between job satisfaction and teachers' intent to stay in the field (Singh & Billingsley, 1996).

Rewards of the 12 Teachers

Several types of rewards, some that are dependent on the individual's sense of self and some that are dependent on the individual's sense of how they are perceived by others are found in this study. Tangible rewards like pay, materials, resources, etc. were not influential factors in the 12 teacher's decisions to leave the field. None of these teachers made more money or had more resources in their general education positions. The rewards that most consistently permeated the 12 teachers' stories were: knowing that you are doing meaningful work; feeling respected by colleagues and those you serve; feeling a sense of competence and excellence in your work; continually growing as a professional; playing a productive role in the organization; and, knowing you are making a difference in the lives of students. The promise of these rewards beckoned a group of 12 young, enthusiastic teachers into the field of special education. The inability to obtain or sustain these rewards ultimately had a major influence on their decisions to leave the field.

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The teachers' expectations regarding what rewards they envisioned receiving when they decided to become special educators is found in their personal contexts in Chapter III, and the barriers they faced in achieving these rewards will be documented within their individual work adjustment cycles in the Chapter V. There are, however, some elements related to rewards that are worth describing from a common group perspective. In this area the teachers' stories did not fall into the generational groupings of Rookies, Intermediates, and Veterans. Instead I will present them in a set of definitions which will in turn embed the individual cycles found in the following chapter into a common context.

Job Satisfaction

> Job satisfaction is wanting to go to work because you know you are needed, your job is important in the scheme of things and you are good at what you do. (Bev)

During the second interview each teacher was asked to give a general definition of job satisfaction. Their definitions were similar in scope. None of the teachers expected to be happy with their jobs every minute of the day or believed that his or her work would be easy and without significant challenge. A common definition of job satisfaction synthesized from the teachers' stories includes the concepts of enjoyment, meaningfulness, balance with personal life, goodness of fit, and competence.

Meaningful Work

> I needed to know what I did was valuable to me, the school, and to the kids and their families. I also needed to know what I worked so hard at would have, in some small way, a positive impact on society and our local community. Meaning in your work is the most important thing. When I lost that I knew I had no other choice but to get out and try something else. (Chuck)

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To do meaningful work was a critical aspect of what the teachers needed to get out of their teaching jobs. They described meaningful work as work that is relevant to students, work that the individual cares about, and work that is important on a plane bigger than itself. Meaningful work has value to the individual doing the work and to the people who are supposed to benefit from the work.

Feeling Respected by Colleagues and Customers

> I don't think you can survive in a work situation unless you have the respect of your peers. I don't mean every person you work with has to love you, there just has to be a minimum level of respect. If you're not respected, but you have self-respect you can isolate yourself and tell yourself that it doesn't matter. That works for a while, but it eventually catches up with you... I know because I tried it for the last three years of my special ed. job. There is nowhere to hide, believe me I tried. (Mary)

The teachers collectively believed that to be respected by colleagues and those you serve means having people treat you as a partner who is knowledgeable, caring, and capable. Colleagues in the study included: general education staff (teachers, counselors, vocational facilitators, etc.); building staff (secretaries, facilitators, etc.), AEA support staff (consultants, psychologists, social workers, etc.), AEA management staff; Department of Education personnel; and administrators. Customers included students, parents, families, and community service providers. The teachers were quick to point out that they were most concerned about the daily aspects of respect and were not looking for awards, pancake breakfasts, or "teacher of the month" designations.

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Feeling a Sense of Competence and Excellence in Your Work

> It was incredibly important for me to be a good teacher; to see myself as a good teacher and to be seen by others as a good teacher. When I started in special education I just couldn't ever find that feeling. In retrospect, I probably didn't give it enough time... but you know how sometimes you just feel something in your gut. I just felt somehow I wasn't going to get what I needed out of special education and I wasn't ever going to be good enough, or good, or even that I could ever figure out whether or not I was good. Sometimes I wish I 'd given it more time. I may have been a little impulsive but you should have seen me during that time. I had bags under my eyes. It was bad. (Rose)

Competence was defined by the teachers as knowing you are doing the right work at the right time and having the skills and attitude to get it done. Excellence in work was defined as doing work on a level of high quality as defined by the individual, customers, and the organization. The teachers believed that in order to feel of sense of competence and excellence in your work you must first know what is expected of you from your customers and the organization and must have continuous feedback on how you are doing.

Playing a Productive Role in the Organization

> When I say that I didn't feel like I fit into the school when I was a special education teacher, I don't mean that people didn't talk to me or I didn't work on committees and things like that. It just always seemed like my kids and I were "add-ons." We'd get the work schedule for our early dismissal days and you could just tell that special education was not really in the thick of the work [of the school]. I remember we were having a big meeting on new math standards for the district, but the special education teachers had to go to a meeting on how to fill out rosters for the computer system... I had to find out about the math standards by asking the other teachers. I felt like someone's little sister who had to find out all of the good stuff second hand. It was embarrassing and put me in a position where I always felt unsure of what was going on. Because of that I never contributed much in meetings. I didn't want to make an ass of myself. (Rhonda)

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To play a productive role in the organization was defined as knowing how you fit into the organization on a day-to-day basis and being able to add value to the system from that position. The teachers gave many examples of feeling isolated from the real goals of the organization, therefore feeling like they were not in a position to add value to the organization. The teachers pointed out that they were not talking about being asked to be on a variety of building or district committees or to be ad hoc members of various teams. In many instances the teachers felt like they had too much empowerment when it came to making decisions and wanted to have more support in blending their work into the daily work of the building and district.

Knowing You are Making a Difference in the Lives of Students

> Let's face it. You're never going to get rich in public education. You go into it because you expect to get other things back, and if you're lucky like me, you do. I worry about the younger teachers. When I started in special education things were different. People appreciated the work I did, God knows they admired anybody that would work with the kids I had and that felt good. It was hard work but I had help from other people in knowing that I made a difference in the lives of my kids. Really the kids and their families. We were close and involved in each other's lives. I knew I made a difference. Now there's so much negativity. Surviving as a special ed. teacher has always meant swimming up stream and having a good sense of your self. Now, I watch these teachers and it looks like they're trying to swim up Niagara Falls. There's so much to get in their way and so many people looking over their shoulder all of the time. It's no wonder half of them drowned every year. (Marge)

The 12 teachers went into the field for reasons that were student-oriented and altruistic. They defined the concept of "knowing you are making a difference in the lives of students" as: understanding what your role is within the scope of the student's life; being able to measure progress within that role; and succeeding in observing student success that can, at least in part, be attributed to your contribution as a teacher. The

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teachers felt a lot of ambiguity in their various roles, which made them unable to know whether they were making a difference. They also felt unprepared when it came to measuring all but the most concrete aspects of their students' progress, which also added to lack of fulfillment in this area.

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CHAPTER V

WORK ADJUSTMENT CYCLES

Introduction

The first aspect of the study looked at the personal context of each teacher, why and when they decided to go into special education and the experiences that got them there (Chapter III). The second piece of the study examined the factors that most influenced the teachers' decisions to leave the field of special education (Chapter IV). This portion of the study looks at the work adjustment cycles of each teacher and how he or she left the field in terms of the events and experiences that led up to his or her final departure. The original idea to explore the teachers' decisions from a work adjustment perspective began in the pilot study. During the pilot interviews the teachers went into great detail regarding the events that caused them dissatisfaction in their work and how they attempted to adjust to those events over time, until they eventually made the decision to leave their positions. After listening to their stories I began to see a kind of cycle emerging, and those observations led to a review of the literature relating to work adjustment. What I found were some universal elements of work adjustment that seemed like an intriguing lens through which to look at special educator attrition and retention issues. In the end this perspective became the most enlightening aspect of the study.

Adjustment to Work: Individual to System

When people enter a job they do so with a variety of expectations. Some of those expectations are easily described, such as level of pay, hours to be worked in a week, access to resources, etc. There are other expectations, however, that are equally

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important in creating individual job satisfaction. In We Are All Self-Employed: The New Social Contract for Working in a Changed World, Cliff Hakim lists seven characteristics of meaningful work:

1. I'm collaborating with others. As a result, I'm understanding what others need, improving my skills, and developing new ones.
2. My life feels reasonably balanced among my work, family, social, and spiritual needs.
3. My values are respected.
4. I can show my enthusiasm and express, not suppress, my authentic self.
5. I feel that my work is an integrated part of me and my life, not an appendage to it.
6. Despite obstacles, I am productive and committed to making a contribution.
7. Money is not the purpose of my work; rather, it is fuel for fulfilling my purpose. (p. 180)

For the 12 teachers in this study these types of expectations were not met, and this eventually led to the their departure. At the time, however, it was difficult for the teachers to verbalize or even recognize these needs. It was not until at least the second layer of interviews that the teachers began to explore the deeper issues of respect, support, value, and growth and how these expectations impacted their decisions. The second layer of interviews also revealed two issues that became critical to understanding their work adjustment cycles – their view of work, and their perception of their influence on the system.

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View of Work

It has been well publicized that people in Generation X can expect to have up to seven different jobs within their lifetimes. The 12 teachers in this study showed signs of generational differences in their views toward work but with more subtle differences than the workforce at large. In this study all 12 teachers originally expected to stay in special education until they retired, and they still expect to remain in teaching until retirement. They saw teaching as their only main career with possible supplementary jobs to boost their income such as coaching, house painting, teaching graduate classes, etc. There were, however, some distinct differences between the Generation X (Rookies and Intermediates) and the Baby Boomers (Veterans), with regard to how many adjustments they were willing to make before they declared the job a poor fit. The Rookies were also more apt to verbalize their need for a balance between their work and personal lives than were their older counterparts. All the teachers touched on the need for differentiation within their jobs over time, and admitted that their moves to general education positions were attempts to self-renew and search for better fits between their needs and the needs of the system. When I probed about the possibility of differentiating their jobs within the field of special education, the teachers admitted that they did not seriously consider differentiation within special education at the time.

The teachers' static view of their future work also impacted their decisions to leave the field. When they thought about how their jobs would be in five, ten, or twenty years their vision included all of the problems they were currently having in their work but with an older and more exhausted version of themselves. From that perspective the

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future looked bleak. All of the teachers did not believe the system would change to meet their needs, now or in the future. They relied entirely on what they perceived to be their personal influence to adjust to the system as the measure of their future job satisfaction.

Perception of Influence

The literature on teachers' perception of influence touches on some of the issues that rose to the surface during this study. In general it shows that teacher empowerment in public schools has expanded the role and involvement of teachers in planning and decision-making regarding school goals and policies (Glickman 1993; Sprague 1992) and not surprisingly, that an individual's personal sense of power can have a direct impact on job satisfaction (Maeroff, 1998). Conger and Kanungo (1988) propose that an individual's personal power needs are met when they "perceive that they have power or when they believe they can adequately cope with events, situations, and/or people they confront" (p. 473). The 12 teachers in this study spoke frequently about how they perceived their influence within the system. They all experienced a great deal of autonomy, (at times even too much), when it came to what happened within their own classrooms, but they did not feel influential when it came to changing their job satisfaction or influencing the system. Some of these perceptions stemmed from their personal beliefs that they alone were responsible for their job satisfaction, while other perceptions dealt with their feelings of not being a valued or productive part of the system. As their adjustment cycles wore on it was this perception of lack if influence that eventually led them to view their special education positions as an *accept* or *reject*

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situation. When they had exhausted their ability to adjust, the teachers saw a transfer out of special education as the only option and made an intractable decision to leave the field.

Adjustment to Work: System to Individual

Despite their feelings that the system would not adjust to their needs adequately enough for them to regain their job satisfaction, the teachers were able to identify some system attempts to do so. All the teachers had what they considered to be high quality induction programs into their initial teaching positions, and each teacher had an assigned mentor from the district who worked with him or her for a minimum of two years. Each teacher also had a consultant from the AEA who was available an average of one time per week during the entire period they were teaching special education. The 12 teachers were appreciative of these resources and programs and did not feel that changes in their quality or structure would have been influential to their decisions. They also reported that a team, made up of colleagues and "outside experts," was available to them on an as-needed basis to provide support with programming and student issues. Each teacher was familiar with the master contract of the district and the formal expectations of the system regarding leaves, hours, etc. These formal contracts did not seem to be problematic for the teachers. The informal contracts and expectations, however, were problematic and led to several barriers within the teachers' work adjustment cycles.

The actual experiences surrounding the informal contracts and expectations of the system were different for each teacher. Many of the teachers talked about the expectation that special education teachers often do not have the "set hours" of general education teachers. Although it was not always explicitly stated, most of the teachers believed there

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was an expectation that special educators would meet with parents, service providers, etc., whenever it was convenient for the other people in the meeting. This often caused late meetings on short notice, which at times created problems for the 12 teachers in terms of balancing work and their personal lives. Another unwritten system expectation cited by the teachers was that good special education teachers don't bother the office with discipline problems, parent conflicts, etc. A good special education teacher (in the eyes of the 12 teachers) was expected to handle problems his or herself. This perception was confusing and frustrating to many of the teachers, since there always seemed to be so many ongoing problems in special education classrooms. Several of the teachers indicated they only began using the office for disciplinary problems after transferring to their general education positions. The last common unwritten expectation that proved to be problematic for the 12 teachers was the idea that putting up with disrespectful adults was "just a part of the job." At the beginning of their special education experiences the teachers showed determination not to accept this aspect of the job, but as time wore on they succumbed to the pressure and began to believe that it was inevitable.

The Cycle of Work Adjustment

Withdrawal

Each teacher went through a series of adjustments to perceived barriers during his or her special education teaching experiences as did (to a lesser extent) the system. The numbers of adjustments varied greatly with the number of years each teacher stayed in the field, but each individual went through an identifiable series. At some point in the series each teacher began to show signs of psychological or even physical withdrawal.

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This withdrawal came at the end of the adjustment cycle and usually directly proceeded his or her final decisions to leave the field (although adjustments were also made during the withdrawal phase). It was during this withdrawal period that each teacher made his or her decision to leave the field. The withdrawal ended with the teacher requesting a transfer to general education.

The psychological withdrawal was usually demonstrated either by the teachers retreating into his or her special education classroom, therefore isolating themselves *within* special education, or by becoming involved in any school activities that didn't relate to special education, resulting in isolation *from* special education. For example, Marge remembered at one point deciding not to get involved with any of the politics or functions of the school and to "only concentrate on my program and my kids." She asked to be removed from several committees of which she had been a member for many years, started eating lunch in her room instead of the lounge, and refused to volunteer for any activities outside of school. Rose, on the other hand, became active in the education association, sat only with general education teachers at lunch and in faculty meetings, and volunteered for anything and everything that didn't pertain to special education. Although the specific activities pursued by each teacher were different, all the teachers showed some kind of psychological withdrawal before their final decision to leave the field.

In addition to psychological isolation many of the teachers actually attempted to physically isolate themselves from the rest of the school by requesting that their classrooms be moved away from the general population of students and teachers. In

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some instances they removed their students from inclusive settings and tried to become as self-contained as possible. In retrospect the teachers could see their actions as withdrawal, but at the time they believed it was a last ditch attempt to revive their sagging job satisfaction by ignoring the people and processes that were interfering with their expectations. None of the teachers believed their supervisors would have viewed their requests or actions as being a sign of withdrawal, or even as particularly negative. As Meg recalled, "I'm sure my principal saw my request to move to the open portable as an opportunity to better serve my kids... That's the way I presented it, and that's the way I was trying to look at it."

Action

The culminating event of each work adjustment cycle was found in the teachers' final decisions to leave the field. Although the adjustment phases for some of the teachers were quite long, once they began to show identifiable signs of withdrawal their final decisions came relatively quickly. Each went through a period where he or she shared thoughts about asking for a transfer with others who were outside of the system. They did not, however, share their dilemmas with anyone inside the system who could have possibly helped them in their adjustments or could have assisted in adjusting the system to their needs. For the most part the options for action they considered during that final decision-making period were quite limited. A few of the teachers considered staying in special education but transferring to other special education programs, either in the same building or in other buildings within the same district. A few teachers considered leaving the district to teach in other special education programs, thinking the

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climate of a new district might make things different. In the end, after talking to teachers in other buildings or districts, the teachers decided that the core elements of their dissatisfaction seemed to be pervasive throughout all of special education. They quickly saw their only option was to leave special education altogether.

Charting Work Adjustment

Tracking the specific work adjustment cycles was an idea that emerged during the interviews. As a researcher I was not initially interested in focusing on the chronology of discrete events; instead, I planned to focus on the totality of their experiences within this period of their work, using the work adjustment framework as a rough guide. During the first interviews, however, I began to realize something. As the teachers attempted to piece together their memories into some kind of coherent whole they started to employ strategies that helped them put isolated events into perspective. The most common strategy used was to start laying out memories using hooks or anchors to ground their stories into some kind of chronological order. Many asked to borrow a sheet of paper and they made timelines by school year or boxes with YEAR 1, YEAR 2, etc. This seemed extremely important for the Veteran group, who had a variety of teaching experiences spanning a relatively long period of time, but also was used by the younger teachers. They then plugged their experiences into their organizers, which seemed to help them categorize their stories and allowed them to elaborate and reflect on their decisions at a deeper level.

Observing this need, between the first and second interviews I sent out some graphic organizers with simple timelines to assist them in organizing their reflections. I

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also made a graphic organizer for myself that captured the major events in chronological order. This eventually evolved into an individual Work Adjustment Chart for each teacher. By listening to the tapes and taking notes during each interview, I was able to create a chart of these events and to code them by which year of the special education teaching experience the event took place. The teachers and I then added to the charts as the interviews progressed. In looking at these charts I decided to try coding each event as to whether it was a perceived barrier to the teachers' job satisfaction, an adjustment to correct a perceived barrier, or a sign of psychological or physical withdrawal. To do this I first had the teachers give me their definition of job satisfaction to make sure I understood the unique interpretations, and then they rated each event on a scale of one to nine (one being the lowest and nine being the highest). I later labeled each event with an (A) for adjustment, (B) for barrier, and (W) for withdrawal. The resulting chart illustrated the variable adjustment cycle of each teacher and visually depicted the point at which the teacher started to withdraw from the job and made their final decision to leave the field. Although I had not intended quantifying the teachers' experiences in this manner, the emergence of this tool proved to be a fresh lens with which to view the problem of special education teacher attrition.

Work Adjustment Cycles of 12 Teachers

Rose

> I still can't believe I left special education after only two years. It seems sort of like a dream to me now. I spent so much time preparing to be a special ed. teacher, and then it just didn't work. I know it must sound strange, but leaving wasn't a part of a plan or anything. I just knew by the way I felt inside that something wasn't right... Driving to school I just wished I could keep going. I knew it wasn't right, and all I could think of was to move on. (Rose)

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Rose only lasted two years in special education. She started sensing barriers almost from the beginning. Despite the fact that she had many people available to support her, Rose felt alone and disconnected. The main barriers for Rose were a sense of being disrespected by her general education colleagues, feeling blind-sided by negative and litigious parents with hostile attitudes toward special education and the school, and not feeling like a valuable part of the system. She made many attempts to adjust to these barriers by enlisting the support team in meetings with teachers and parents, seeking the support of the principal, and increasing her knowledge about legal and procedural issues. She joined a gym to battle the fatigue that began to set in by the end of her first year, and she creatively altered her schedule and curriculum to better serve the students. By the second semester of her first year in special education, however, signs of withdrawal began to surface.

Rose car-pooled every day with another teacher in the school. On Monday mornings she remembered feeling a knot in her stomach when they approached the building. Rose recalled telling her friend of her feelings and of her friend's uneasy reaction. The other teacher was also new and shared Rose's fatigue and many of the same rookie frustrations, but something was not quite right in Rose's reactions, and they both knew it (although they probably couldn't have articulated it at the time). Rose had also talked about how she was feeling about her job with her boyfriend at the time. He was sympathetic but had little background on how long it took teachers to settle into the job. He suspected that these feelings might be common to most new teachers, and that perhaps time would change things for the positive. Rose was less patient. She decided to

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take her job satisfaction into her own hands. Before the start of her second year Rose went to the principal and requested that she have a separate room for her program (at the time she was sharing the room with another teacher). He conceded, and her program was moved to a small room at the end of the 1st grade hall. She had succeeded in moving closer to the general education classrooms and, unbeknownst to her at the time, began her withdrawal from special education. For a while this physical adjustment seemed to be just the change she needed. Rose had more control over her day and could offer her students a wider variety of activities. She and her students were no longer located in the wing with the other special services. They were now in the mainstream and in the thick of things.

By the end of the first quarter, however, the nagging doubts about whether or not special education was a good fit for Rose returned. At the suggestion of her mentor (a veteran special education teacher in the building), Rose decided to get involved in other non-special education activities within the building and district. She became a member of the district negotiating team for the education association, even though she didn't know the first thing about the master contract. She volunteered for the social committee and the math committee and any other committee that needed a member. At lunch she ate with the 1st grade teachers rather than the special education teachers and she began to call on her consultant and mentor less and less. At the time Rose saw it as a proactive, (if not slightly desperate) attempt to flee the dreaded knot in her stomach by seeking out

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greener pastures, or perhaps to distract her from the inevitable. To a certain extent it worked, but deep inside the feeling still gnawed at her, and by the second semester of her second year she moved closer to taking action.

One day (Rose remembered that it was snowing outside) she asked one of the 1st grade teachers who the district would hire to replace her during her maternity leave the following year. Although Rose did not directly indicate an interest, the teacher caught on and encouraged her to apply for a transfer if she was interested. The other 1st grade teachers at the lunch table were a little shocked that such a good special education teacher would consider transferring, but they were all supportive and seemed genuinely interested in having Rose as a part of what was perceived to be a tightly knit team. For the next two months Rose let the thoughts of transferring to general education stew in her brain. She made mental pro and con lists on her bedroom ceiling when she couldn't sleep at night. She mentioned it to her boyfriend once or twice and brought it up with her mother over spring vacation. Rose could detect a faint air of disappointment in her mother's reaction, but she also knew her mother sensed something eating away at her daughter. Two weeks after spring break Rose made her decision. It was four o'clock on a Tuesday and she was sitting alone in her room working on lesson plans. For some unknown reason she looked up and it hit her. Rose remembered an unusual sense of calm riding home that night. It would be another week before she made an appointment with the principal to ask for the transfer, but by then the decision was made. Yet another special education teacher had gone out through the revolving door.

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Jed

> I was surprised by my decision to transfer to social studies. It was hell trying to coach and work and go back to school at the same time. I know it sounds weird, but I was so sure that I would stay in special ed. I thought I'd found my niche.... But I guess you don't always know until you try. It's probably hard to believe, but I really miss the kids. I have to admit ... I don't miss the other stuff. (Jed)

Jed lasted three years in special education. He had already served a year in the at-risk program the year before and believed he knew what to expect. Several barriers that eventually impacted his job satisfaction popped up during his first year in the special education program. Many of Jed's students came from outside the district. Some were in foster care, others were in residential treatment, and still others simply seemed to move from school to school for a variety of complicated reasons. One of Jed's biggest struggles in special education was trying to collaborate and get information from the various factions who currently (or had previously) worked with the students. There were files and forms and rules and procedures and deadlines that were never met. Jed remembered it as being an overwhelming, frustrating nightmare. He did his best to figure out the system and built new procedures and forms when the old ones didn't seem to be working, but the pile of unfinished communications never seemed to get any smaller. Service providers wouldn't call him back so he got in his car and went to their offices. Former teachers and administrators refused to come to the school for meetings so he drove to them (sometimes across the state). Parents didn't come in to sign IEPs and he moved the meetings to their homes. Jed was not afraid of hard work, and he was willing to go the extra mile to support his students. While he was off going the extra mile however, stacks of what he called "paperwork emergencies" covered his desk: this IEP

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wasn't done on time – this student's weighting doesn't match the computer –the principal got a call from someone at the AEA about an overdue IEP and is threatening to pull the funding if...blah...blah...blah. After about a year it all started to sound the same. By the end of his first year in special education Jed was starting to have second thoughts. Instead of feeling rewarded as a special education teacher he was beginning to feel harassed.

Another barrier Jed faced was the integration of his students into any general education classes. It was like pulling teeth. For obvious reasons these were challenging kids to have in a classroom, and Jed knew that. He approached the general education teachers with caution and offered as much support as possible to make the integration successful. Eventually though, it seemed to Jed that the teachers began to take advantage of his generosity. His students were sent back to his room for minor infractions (infractions for which other students would have remained in the class). If the assignment seemed difficult his students were sent back to his room for assistance, rather than receiving assistance by the content teacher. Jed was glad to help, but the uncertainty of knowing which kids he would have in his room at any one time made it difficult to provide coherent instruction and eventually began to zap his energy and enthusiasm.

During his second year in special education Jed came up with a new theory – maybe if he concentrated fully on his students and his program, the external stuff wouldn't wear him out so much. So he began to withdraw into special education. He stopped calling former service providers; if they called him that was fine, but he had better things to do with his time. He stopped pushing for integration. If the teachers

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didn't want the kids that was fine, he would keep them. If the teachers sent a student back to him, that was fine, the integration was over. At the time a little voice kept telling Jed this attitude might not actually be in the best interest of his students, but a louder voice spoke to him about his own survival. Jed began eating lunch in his room, since many of his students had been kicked out of the cafeteria. He joined the faculty only for mandatory meetings that took place once a month and didn't socialize during or after school with any of the teachers. Prior to this year Jed had always played in pick-up basketball games after school with some of the other teachers, but now he often had a student in his room after school for disciplinary reasons. He had stopped sending kids to the office because it didn't seem to do any good. In other words, Jed had isolated himself and his students from the rest of the system. He had unknowingly gone into a survival mode and taken his kids with him.

By the third year Jed began to reflect on his actions. By the end of the first semester he realized that his new theory of isolation would eventually be destructive to his students and was only a stop-gap measure in increasing his own job satisfaction. By spring he knew it was time to make a decision. He remembers the decision to leave special education as one of the hardest he has had to make in his life. It seemed to him to be one of his first real failures, and being the kind of competitive guy that he was, it stung. Jed remembered going into the principal's office. It was a Monday in late March during the NCAA[4] basketball tournament. He and his principal spent the first 10 minutes chatting about basketball, and then he remembered awkwardly blurting out his request for

[4] National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

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a transfer to general education. His principal was shocked and disappointed. It was, after all, the principal who had steered him into special education in the first place. The principal spent what seemed like hours (but in truth was probably about 20 minutes) trying to talk Jed out of his decision. The plea was persuasive but in the end futile. Jed had made up his mind, and there was no turning back.

Grace

> It's been good for me to talk about this, but it's been hard. If somebody had told me that I'd quit special ed. after only two years I'd have told them they were crazy... I thought it was my calling. That sounds so pathetic now. I really don't blame anybody but myself. I just couldn't make it work. (Grace)

Of all of the stories I heard Grace's story probably got to me the most. It was all I could do not to jump across the table and convince her to go back to special education. As with many of the teachers, Grace had all the right stuff of a great special education teacher; the only thing that was off was the fit between Grace and the job. Her apologetic perspective on leaving the field made her story painful to tell and painful to hear. Grace's barriers dealt mainly with feelings of disrespect and a need to be valued. She was confident in her abilities but very sensitive to the impressions of others. It was vitally important to Grace that her work be valued and respected. Her examples of the administrator calling special education "a runaway train" and imaginary "red alerts" going off at the AEA were but a few of the barriers she faced in her short, two year stint in special education.

With each barrier Grace tried valiantly to adjust. She asked the consultant to review all her paperwork before she sent it in. She made sure all deadlines were met with ample time to spare. Grace even attended optional training sessions on paperwork and

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procedures to make sure that she was doing everything right. Unfortunately, as she struggled to adjust to the myriad of nonstudent system expectations, there were also kids' needs to be met. The students Grace worked with over that two-year period had a wide range of needs. Grace envied the members of her support team. They could rattle off syndromes and characteristics and strategies with what Grace perceived to be a stream of effortless expertise. She knew that it was not fair to compare herself to professionals who had been in the field so long, but she couldn't help it. As Grace sat at home on Sunday evenings, preparing for the week ahead, she had to consciously push out the doubts; doubts about balancing it all, learning it all, putting up with it all. During her first year Grace would not allow herself to recognize the doubts. She convinced herself that all young teachers felt this way; it was normal and the feelings would pass. At night, however, the doubts crept into her thoughts and began to grow like a tumor that had yet to be discovered. Prior to this period of her life Grace was a great sleeper, complete with Technicolor dreams. After 30 minutes of yoga and a cup of chamomile tea Grace used to nod off immediately and sleep soundly through the night. Now, particularly on Sunday nights, she awoke repeatedly with jagged dreams about losing her students on field trips, forgetting her students names, and standing in front of the faculty stark naked. She had begun to use Visine in the mornings to soothe her bloodshot eyes and had allowed junk food to creep into what was once an admirably healthy diet. She kept telling herself that a little stress came with every new job, but on some level she knew better.

Grace came back from summer vacation with a renewed sense of enthusiasm. Her new theory centered on organization. She went into the building early to reorganize

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everything. If Grace could somehow get properly organized, all the other stuff that was eating away at her would somehow fall into place. She bought brightly colored file folders, a label maker, wall-sized schedule boards, the latest organizational software, and 20 neon plastic baskets, one for each student. These were purchased out of her own money, but Grace didn't care because she had somehow cracked the puzzle of her discontent, and job satisfaction lay right around the corner. Of course, as with most temporary adjustments, the new organization system worked well and for a while bolstered Grace's sagging self-doubts. She even began to sleep a little better. But by winter break the demons began to edge their way back into her collective consciousness. It was time for a new theory, or perhaps a more realistic appraisal of the situation.

By February of her second year Grace began to think seriously about what she could and couldn't change about her job. She considered going to the principal, but she just wasn't sure what she would say. She talked to a group of her friends who, without hesitation, told her to get out of special education. Grace understood their reasoning, but was having considerable difficulty giving up her dream. She remembers her friend Sarah telling her that if special education teachers are leaving the field in record numbers, perhaps there is something wrong with special education itself, not with the teachers. Intellectually Grace knew that Sarah was partly right, that there were real problems in all the garbage that went along with special education. Emotionally, however, it was still a very difficult decision for Grace, and to this day she still sees it as a personal failure.

Grace's withdrawal was more personal and less observable than the other teachers. She told no one at school of her job dissatisfaction and she went out of her way

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to appear as if everything was all right. Her colleagues and supervisor apparently bought into her illusion and believed things were going very well with Grace and her students. The parents of her students thought she was off to a great start. At her last professional growth conference the principal gave her glowing remarks, but none of that was enough to change Grace's mind. In early March she made her decision. For the next week Grace slept like a baby. Just knowing the decision was made lifted an enormous weight from her shoulders. Two weeks after she made her private decision, Grace made an appointment to see the principal. She was blunt and to the point about needing a transfer out of special education; English would be her preference, but she would consider other options as well, including leaving the district. As Grace remembers it, her principal was temporarily speechless. He tried to unravel the factors that played a part in her decision in an attempt to understand what went wrong, but Grace had little interest in the past at the moment. Grace was ready to move forward, and she had convinced herself that forward meant leaving special education.

Elizabeth

> When I think of going back to get my masters in special education and all the time it took. I was pregnant at the time. As you can imagine it was a strain on the whole family, but I was so proud when I finished it and got my job in special ed. Looking back at those four years it seems like it was somebody else's life. Like somebody else made the decision to leave. (Elizabeth)

Elizabeth made it through four years in special education; two in a preschool developmental program and two in an elementary program for students with mild disabilities. The events Elizabeth described leading up to her decision to leave the field of special education were specific and intense. In retrospect she realized some of her

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experiences were just due to bad luck. While most special education teachers run into hostile parents or threats of due process somewhere along the path of a lengthy special education career, Elizabeth managed to step into some high profile situations in her first two years. She was involved in a problem case with a parent that eventually went into the first stages of due process, and she inherited a parent with great animosity for the school system. While she expected these types of situations might arise, the amount of time Elizabeth was forced to spend on these issues created a definite barrier in her job satisfaction, as well as her ability to concentrate on her students. She also felt that the school personnel assisting her with this mess often (perhaps unintentionally) made her feel a subordinate in the process. To adjust to these barriers Elizabeth took a class in special education law, went to workshops, and read articles pertaining to similar legal issues. This helped with her confidence and understanding of what was happening and it allowed her to more productively participate in the process. The issue of time away from her students, however, began to be a primary dissatisfier for Elizabeth. She had high expectations of herself as a teacher, and she knew she would not last long in a position that didn't allow her opportunities to meet those expectations.

By the end of her second year Elizabeth had weathered her "parent storms" but had taken a beating in the process. She was struggling to balance her new job with her family needs. She began to realize that the time she spent on what she considered "not about student learning" issues was robbing her of quality time with her students and with her own children. At the end of the second year Elizabeth decided to escape the intensity of working with early childhood students who had moderate and severe disabilities and

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decided that a job working with older students with mild disabilities might be a better fit. Unlike some of the other Rookies in the study, Elizabeth was unapologetic about changing positions. She realized that it was often difficult for preschool children to change teachers, but she also had a firm belief that her job satisfaction was crucial to the quality of her students' education. Elizabeth was an astute observer of her fellow teachers. She watched them in the lounge and listened to their perspectives about their jobs. She realized that far too many teachers in all areas felt trapped in their positions and seemed paralyzed when it came to making adjustments that would restore their love of teaching. Elizabeth was determined not to become one of them. She would continue to seek out new teaching positions for as long as it took, although she never really thought her search would take her out of the field of special education altogether.

Elizabeth was rejuvenated by her new job in the mild disabilities program. Her students ranged from second grade to fifth grade. She worked with them in small groups for about an hour a day. The intensity was considerably less than when working in a preschool setting. At first it seemed to provide the relief she needed in balancing her work and her personal life. She started out her third year with great optimism that she had found a good fit between her expectations and the system's expectations. As the year wore on, however, some new barriers began to pop up. In her new job it was critical that she collaborate with her students' classroom teachers on a frequent and productive basis. Coming from a position where she was basically in charge of her own students (not to mention three adult paraprofessionals) the shift of power was a tougher transition than she expected. In her new position she had to work around the other teachers' schedules,

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which at times seemed utterly impossible. She also had to understand each teacher's idiosyncratic needs in terms of their unique (and in Elizabeth's perspective often erratic) communication style, and then adapt her own communications toward those needs. The whole process was exhausting. She employed the assistance of several veteran teachers in the special education department, but they just shook their heads and reminded her that "it comes with the job." By the end of the first semester of her third year in special education, Elizabeth started to question whether she was willing to accept all the things that seemed to come with this job.

Elizabeth's next adjustment strategy could be summed up as "if you can't beat 'em – join 'em." Elizabeth decided to spend more time with the general education teachers, initially in an attempt to form better relationships. She enjoyed the company of the other special educators in the building, but she found they spent an "awful lot of time" bemoaning their place within the organizational structure. To Elizabeth it seemed as if the only way to survive in special education was to enjoy wallowing in the injustice of it all and that just was not a good match with Elizabeth's optimistic personality. While her initial attempts to move closer to general education were aimed at creating more productive relationships within her special education position, it was not long before Elizabeth began to feel more comfortable in the general education teachers' climate. She was careful to let me know that general education teachers also occasionally "take to wallowing about injustice" but that those incidences were less frequent and more specific.

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By the end of her third year in special education Elizabeth had cut her ties with many of the special education teachers and support staff and was drifting in a new direction. In her fourth, and last year, Elizabeth realized that she would make the decision. She told her husband she was thinking about leaving special education altogether, and she shared some of her feelings with a couple of the elementary general education teachers. They were all surprised but supportive. In the spring of that year Elizabeth sent a letter to the building principal requesting a transfer to a general education classroom position. As soon as he got the request, the principal asked Elizabeth to come in for a meeting. The principal did his best to try and get Elizabeth to delve into her reasons for wanting the transfer, but by that point Elizabeth opted to stay pretty much on the surface and refocused the conversation to the future. Elizabeth remembered that the principal was very gracious and complimentary about her work as a special educator, but he also made it clear that he did not want to lose her altogether. The following year Elizabeth transferred to a third grade classroom position where she has been ever since. Her years in special education are a bit of a blur to her now, but she is reminded of the journey each time a new special education teacher is introduced at the first faculty meeting. She always means to stop by and talk to them about her experiences, maybe save them from some of the mistakes that she made, but there is always so much to do – and so little time.

Meg

> Those years in special ed. are kind of a fuzzy now. I was sure about going into it and sure about getting out of it. Teaching fourth grade has its challenges, but you really can't compare it to special education. There was just so much stuff attached to special ed.; so much made up stuff that didn't really have to happen. Sometimes

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> when you get a group together and they all hear the same thing over and over everyone starts to believe this is just the way it is. Now that I've been out a while I'm convinced it doesn't have to be that way. There's really no reason for it. (Meg)

Meg freely admitted that on a personal level she was a wreck during those years in special education. She was going through a messy divorce and trying to raise three children at the time. In addition to her personal problems, however, Meg had definite ideas about what was and is still wrong with special education, and why she felt forced to leave the field. Meg was unapologetic about her decision and clear about the barriers to which she ultimately could not adjust. The barriers she cited most often had to do with external processes. They included the processes set up to put kids into special education, monitor student records, take kids out of special education, and ensure student and parent rights were being met. It wasn't that Meg didn't think these things needed to be done, she just believed that public education had turned some rather basic ideas into a three-ring circus. As these barriers arose Meg attempted to adjust. She worked with her support staff, changed procedures on command, and attended sessions on the latest, greatest way to fill out paperwork. During her first two years Meg struggled to figure it all out. By the beginning of her second year she thought she had pretty much nailed it, only to find the procedures and forms were about to change, and she would have to start all over. Meg watched the older, more experienced teachers react to these changes. Some rolled their eyes and others quietly chose not to comply with many of the changes. She could tell from their reactions they had been through these cycles before, many times. Their philosophy seemed to be that it was impossible to *really* figure it out and that most of it was some kind of power game. At the same time Meg was trying to figure

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out how her work fit into the scheme of the building and district. Her professional growth opportunities were always focused on paperwork issues. Rarely did she learn anything that would help her better teach kids. She was also frustrated by how little involvement the administration had with the special education programs. Whether accurate or not, Meg had the sense that special education was a part of the system because it was legislated to be there, and for no other reason. As a young teacher Meg was determined not to let her frustrations interfere with her dreams, but by the end of her second year many of her original expectations about being a special educator were fading away.

During her third year in special education Meg decided to forget about all the external baggage and focus directly on her students. She created a curriculum, which was presented at several conferences, and began service learning projects that received praise from colleagues and community members. The recognition felt good, and for the first time since she started teaching it felt like people were noticing her work. Her collaboration with general education teachers, however, suffered. She rarely checked with them about student progress, and what Meg was doing with her students (in the one hour a day in which she saw them) had little connection to their general classroom work. Meg knew there was a problem. She had somehow moved into a survival mode that had, at least temporarily, bolstered her sagging job satisfaction but would not be good for her students in the long run. By the end of her third year in special education Meg was in a quandary.

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Meg's withdrawal from her job took place over a two year period, longer than most of the other teachers. She continued to isolate herself from the rest of the building. She concentrated on her projects and presented her work at various conferences in the area, and as exciting as that was for a new teacher, she knew something was not right. As the last two years drug on Meg became more and more isolated. By her fourth year she rarely even communicated with the other special education teachers. Meg brought her lunch and took walks during her lunch break when the weather allowed. She scheduled students in her room every period of the day and worked on her projects at home and on weekends. She planned "fun" things for her students, in retrospect she thought to receive their positive feedback. The notoriety of being recognized for her projects no longer overshadowed her job dissatisfaction. Midway through her last year Meg began to realistically size up her options. She didn't believe moving to another special education program would make much of a difference. She didn't talk to the principal because she didn't see the point. Meg even considered leaving teaching altogether, but as a single mother that didn't seem like a wise idea. After talking to one of the AEA staff she briefly looked into pursuing a consultant position, but she did not believe she had the energy to really try and change what was wrong with the system. In just five years she had come full circle. The young, energetic teacher, who had once believed anything was possible, now succumbed to the realization that special education would never change and that her only option was to leave the field. Six years after her decision Meg is happily teaching fourth grade. She is still concerned about the field of special education (although she was quick to say that many things would have to change before she would even contemplate

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returning) and thinks about those years often. Meg also makes a point to try and make the new special education teachers in her building feel like a valuable part of the system, but she thinks it may be a losing battle.

Becky

> I really believed that I belonged in special education. I thought I could bring something to these kids that would be special. I really wanted it to work. I was devastated when I decided to leave. I still miss it, some of it. There were just too many things working against you at once. (Becky)

Becky was very specific about the barriers she faced in her seven years in a BD program. Of course, students with behavior disorders present their own challenges, but Becky repeatedly emphasized that she did not leave the field because of student issues. The barriers for Becky began almost immediately and lasted throughout her seven years in special education. Her attempts to adjust to these barriers were numerous and extensive, but after seven years she was worn down and simply didn't have enough energy to keep up the adjustments. The first milestone event that stood out in Becky's memory took place on the first district inservice day. Having had one previous year of experience in general education, it was not her first inservice meeting, but it was her first as a special education teacher. The focus of the inservice was on the new reading curriculum being implemented by the district. Becky had heard about the new curriculum and was excited at the prospect of learning more about it. She assumed it would be appropriate for many of her students in the BD program. After a brief introduction the teachers were given their materials and were split into groups by grade level. It didn't take long for Becky to realize there were no materials for her and that she was not included in any group. The district curriculum facilitator, who was running the

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meeting, indicated to her that materials for the BD program came out of a separate budget and that the reading budget simply didn't have enough funds to support special education programs. When Becky asked which group she should join, she was informed that the special education teachers would be meeting "down the hall" in the library to review a new procedures manual. At the time Becky thought the whole incident was a fluke. By the end of her seventh year, however, she saw it as symbolic of the way special education fit, or in this case didn't fit, into the overall system. For the duration of her experience in special education Becky never got over the feeling of being "sent down the hall," away from the real work of the school.

Other barriers Becky faced included problems integrating students in other classes, difficulties with support from the administrators in the office, negative stereotypes about students with behavior problems, and parents who were unable or unwilling to hold up (what Becky saw) as their part of the bargain. With each new challenge Becky would mount a solution. She met with parents on Saturday; she sat down with the principal to devise a new behavior system; she worked with the support team to keep her paperwork timely and in order; and she even volunteered to be a part of curriculum committees in an attempt to bring special education issues into the mainstream functions of the system. During her second and third year she gave up her preparation time to sit in on grade level meetings, thinking if she showed a genuine interest in what was happening in general education, perhaps the teachers would show more of an interest in her program and students. Becky also took an active role in communicating with the residential treatment center where many of her students lived.

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She went to meetings and dropped by for impromptu visits in an attempt to improve communications and create a better relationship between the center and the school. By the fourth year of her special education teaching, however, signs of withdrawal began to emerge.

At this point Becky had poured all of herself into trying to make the job fit, and there were days it did. She loved the kids and was still undaunted by their outbursts and seemingly irreparable damage. The program was more structured and productive then ever before, but Becky still felt a lack of connection with the rest of the system. She decided that it must have been some kind of transference; people stayed their distance from her kids and somehow transferred those negative feelings onto her and the program in general. The bags under her eyes became a reflection of her dissatisfaction. She stopped attending committee meetings and making attempts to improve the communication with the residential treatment center. She stopped trying to integrate her students if the integration seemed too challenging. She moved her students into a vacant classroom near the cafeteria, far away from the mainstream classrooms. She stopped offering to meet with parents in their homes and started to demand that the parents came to the school, even though she knew many of them wouldn't. In a sense she remembers kind of giving up, but not all at once. The letting go happened over months, maybe even the last two years. She talked to her husband about her feelings, and he encouraged her to make a change, but she didn't go to the principal or the department head with her dissatisfaction. On February 23 (she remembered the date because it was her birthday) Becky gave herself a birthday present. She made the decision to change jobs, whatever

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that would come to mean. At that point Becky just wanted her smile back. If it meant leaving special education, so be it. If it meant leaving teaching, so be it. In the beginning of March Becky talked to the principal and laid out her scenario. Becky knew it wouldn't be an easy sell. BD teachers are hard to find and even harder to keep. She knew the principal would not want to move her, but she also didn't believe he would want to lose her from the system entirely. Despite her feelings of failure, Becky knew she was a good teacher and so did he. At the risk of having Becky leave the district or teaching altogether, her principal finally relented and offered her an elementary classroom position for the following year. Becky accepted and has been there ever since. Her fifth graders are now her pride and joy. The bags beneath her eyes have vanished and she feels comfortable with her place within the system, but she swears a little piece of her heart will always remain in the BD class, down at the end of the hall.

Mary

> I am a person who likes to do things right. I know that about myself. It's my strength and my curse... In special education I found the outside demands to be too much... Being a math teacher is a better match for me. I know what is expected of me. I can keep up with the changes... It was very unnerving to feel like there was someone standing over my shoulder all the time, inspecting my work... The isolation got to me, too. The students came and went but I hardly ever had a chance to talk about teaching or anything with adults. I still use a lot of my special education training in my classes, which is something... It just didn't turn out like I had imagined... It just didn't work. (Mary)

Mary came to the interviews after great preparation. She had dates and events, all in chronological order. It was obvious to me this was not the first time Mary had analyzed her decision to leave special education. Mary was a woman with a plan, and her plan was to complete her master's degree and teach in a special education program until

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she retired at the approximate age of 57. I got the impression that Mary didn't often alter her plans, and the idea that this particular plan went so awry didn't seem to sit well with her. Mary had the barriers and events of her experience printed out neatly on three-by-five inch note cards. She went through each experience and the accompanying description as if it had happened yesterday. She saw her participation in the study as an opportunity to contribute to the science of education, and that was reason enough for her. Mary was matter-of-fact about her presentation and didn't seem to lay blame with either the system or herself for her decision to leave the field. Her reason for leaving was succinct; she couldn't concentrate on so many things at the same time and still do them well. She liked her principal at the time but was not satisfied in his level of knowledge or interest regarding her Level I program. To remedy this she sent him monthly updates on what was happening with her students, which seemed to increase his knowledge but not necessarily his participation. The parents of her students lacked "follow-through" with their children, at least by Mary's standards. They didn't usually come to conferences and frequently did not return communications from the school, which irritated many of the school officials. Mary attempted to intervene and created alternative modes of communication, often involving herself as a go-between. She believed the parents' lack of involvement with their children was simply a reaction to negative prior experiences and that by saturating them with positive communications their attitudes would eventually change. Mary had many such theories, filled with optimism and fueled by an almost manic work ethic. She analyzed every barrier and counterattacked with an equally complex solution. Problem solving was her key to the world, and Mary was sure that

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with the right amount of information, any problem could be solved to a reasonable conclusion. Perhaps that is why, even though Mary admitted to having doubts about the fit of this particular job around the third year, it took her another five years to actually make the decision. Mary could never be accused of being a quitter.

The signs of Mary's withdrawal began in her fourth year of teaching. Mary's story was told in strict chronological order, and by the time we reached the fourth year I had run out of room on Mary's work adjustment chart. She had devised systems, rewritten curriculum, sought training, mastered technologies, and probably driven more than a few people crazy trying to make this job work. Mary used her mentor and consultant, sought the advice of her department chair, talked to veteran teachers, read journal articles, contacted the department of education, argued with the paperwork police, and offered parenting groups in her first three years of teaching special education. She was a strategy machine. During the fourth year, however, the machine began to show some signs of wear and tear. She still got nasty memos and e-mails on her paperwork (which I can only imagine sent her completely over the roof), her students were not making the gains for which she had hoped, the other teachers were not actively buying into her various systems meant to strengthen communication, and many of her parents were still not displaying acceptable follow-through. Mary was stumped. She went to a veteran special education teacher in her building and shared her frustrations. The master teacher's advice was in Mary's words, "to lower her expectations" and "let some of the crap go by." While this advice may have seemed comforting to some, for Mary it began a hodge-podge of disastrous attempts to act against her very nature. She stopped doing

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schoolwork at night and focused on her craft projects. She stopped teaching summer school classes to devote more time to her gardening. She tried to accept the fact that her parents would probably never follow-through and gave up on the parenting classes (they weren't very well attended anyway). She stopped teaching her students new skills and instead helped them get their homework completed (which made her much more popular with the other teachers). And eventually she stopped caring that the principal didn't seem interested in what she was doing or why she was doing it.

Not surprisingly, these attempts at withdrawing from her own expectations did not work for Mary. In retrospect, she believed that she had made her decision to leave the field during her seventh year of teaching special education. In reality, it took her another year to actually make the request to transfer to general education, spurred on by learning of a math vacancy opening up in her building. When she met with the principal to discuss her decision he was surprised. He praised Mary for her vigilance and wondered out loud that "if she couldn't stick it out in special education, who could?" Mary was grateful for the affirmation, but undaunted in her decision to find a better fit. In watching Mary's body language and listening to the changes in her tone of voice I imagined that this was a painful decision for her to make and one she still thinks about from time to time. She doubted that she would ever return to special education and seems genuinely satisfied with her new plan to teach math until her retirement. But of course, even the best-laid plans can sometimes go awry.

Joanna

> My years in special ed. were very important to me. I thought it would be a perfect fit... I knew I was taking a risk at the time... I'm glad I took the risk... Sustaining

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> yourself in any special ed. program is tough, BD is even tougher. I don't pretend to have the answers... I do think there are things that can be done to make special education more doable, actually, something must be done. (Joanna)

Joanna began her career teaching reading at the middle school level. Many of the students she worked with had multiple problems in both their school and personal lives, but none of them held a candle to the kids and families she met in the BD program. Joanna knew the work was important. She knew it would require more time, effort, and patience than most teaching positions, but Joanna believed she was up to the job. In retrospect she was careful not to minimize the challenge of working with students who had this level of need. It was, as she had expected, incredibly difficult work. The barriers that began to consume her job satisfaction, however, were not necessarily connected to the students' needs. Joanna was not a person who was easily flustered, but the extraneous stuff that was attached to special education proved to be unmanageable. Her first barriers came with paperwork and procedural issues. Joanna was frustrated and angry at the way special education teachers were treated regarding these expectations. She remembers being herded into auditoriums like livestock, then being forced to endure a set of predictable ice breakers, (an hour of someone writing things down on poster-sized paper at the front of the room in a thinly valed attempt to make the audience think they were actually participating in the activity), and ending with a series of discrete commands on how the special education teachers were supposed to fill out forms and follow flow charts. There was never any rationale or real explanation for the changes, so the teachers ended up doing the best they could with the limited background. For the first half of her ten year stint in special education Joanna attempted to continuously adjust to

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these changes, but she eventually grew weary of the cattle call and slowly started to mindlessly walk through the process, as did the other veteran teachers.

In her early years Joanna also endured the sense of disconnect and isolation that many of the other teachers in the study described, but because she had become a highly experienced teacher in the building, she overcame much of that by taking an active role in numerous building activities (many of which were not necessarily attached to special education). During her sixth year in special education Joanna's reading background and teaching experience became valuable to the district, as it launched a reading initiative and sought out reading experts, particularly at the secondary level. This new role helped Joanna differentiate her job in a way that reconnected her to the system and allowed her new areas of professional growth.

In her last few years of special education, however, Joanna began to be bogged down by another barrier; the revolving door of teachers in her department. In the old days (as Joanna remembered them) the veteran teachers rallied around the new special education teachers. One of them was assigned as a mentor, but all the veteran teachers kept a close eye on the new hires and offered both technical and collegial support. In Joanna's last three years the department lost 50% of its special education teachers each year. Many of these teachers had no teaching experience, most had just started on their special education certification courses, and some were merely substitutes filling space. As the head of the department, Joanna tried to adjust to these changes by having frequent department meetings that included short sessions on the basics. The consultants were also overwhelmed. Their role had traditionally been to support special educators who

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had already been trained but needed field assistance. The consultant's assignments didn't take into consideration this new phenomenon. They didn't have the time or resources to start from scratch with these teachers. The principal also had his hands full and lacked the technical skills to train these new hires so much of the responsibility for holding the department together was left to Joanna and one other veteran teacher who was nearing retirement. While she didn't fault the efforts of most of the uncertified teachers and substitutes (they were actually doing about as well as could be expected) the reputation of the department suffered and gave the general education teachers a lot to complain about. To make matters more personal, at her annual physical Joanna had to face the fact that for the first time in her life she had put on ten extra pounds that would not seem to come off. Between the pressures of her job and the pressures of family life, the once health conscious jock seemed to be succumbing to the clichés of middle age, which was in no way acceptable to her. Her skin was looking sallow, and her once regular sleeping habits became a bit erratic. By the end of her seventh year, Joanna knew something had to give.

Joanna's withdrawal from her job started slowly in her eighth year. The first sign she recalled was a meeting with the principal in which she refused to continue to be the head of the department. The principal was frustrated, but he understood the pressures of working with such a challenging group of students while at the same time trying to "bottle feed" so many inexperienced, underqualified rookie teachers. He agreed to let her take a year off but asked her to reconsider the following year. She consented, but in the back of her mind she wasn't really considering it at all. That year she got off a couple of curriculum committees and volunteered to head the social committee. For the next three

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years the middle school had the most organized and socially stimulating events anyone could remember. She arranged trips, parties, and informal get-togethers. The faculty was greatly appreciative and frequently praised her efforts. After school Joanna would run five miles, and on weekends she ran in the occasional 5K race. The exercise helped her manage her stress and eventually allowed her to zip up her old pants. She felt physically good, but the shroud of chaos that surrounded the special education department was always in her peripheral vision.

Joanna tried, over the course of three years, to isolate herself from the department, but by her tenth year she realized her attempts were futile. Joanna cared about the special education department and how much it was valued and respected by the rest of the staff. She couldn't stand to be a part of something that had sunk into such mediocre quality. On a fishing vacation during the summer break of her ninth year, Joanna announced to her husband and youngest son that this was her last year as a BD teacher. Both were surprised, but both had seen the toll the job had taken on their wife and mother, and they supported her decision. She didn't bring it up again with anyone again for almost six months. She remembered thinking that if she confided in the other teachers or the principal she might be talked out of it, and she knew it was what had to be done. That last semester she sized up the potential teaching vacancies for the following year. It was her hope to stay in the building, but she was resigned to the possibility of seeking a general education position elsewhere if nothing was available in her current building. When she heard a rumor that the administration was going to add another at-risk teacher, Joanna knew it was the right time. She marched into the principal's office and made him

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an offer he couldn't refuse. Joanna has remained in the at-risk job for several years and assumes she will retire from the position. Although the students present a lot of the same challenges, Joanna describes the jobs as two different worlds. In at-risk, Joanna informed me, there are limited politics, reasonable paperwork expectations, few external inspections, rarely threats of lawsuits, and much more connection to the daily functions of the school. Although she still misses the field, and often has pangs of guilt about how the department is functioning, she doesn't regret her decision, and doesn't plan to return.

Chuck

> My brother was in special education. When I decided to go into teaching, special ed. seemed to be a natural extension. I had no idea what I was getting into. My brother's teacher always seemed so happy, of course that was a long time ago. Maybe I should have stuck around and tried mental disabilities or something... Nine years was enough for me. There are a lot of different things that a special ed. teacher has to put up with that most people don't see. It's a lethal combination. At least it was for me. (Chuck)

Nine years in a behavior disorders program is considered a fairly long run these days. Chuck remembered his time in special education with mixed emotions. He came away with the feeling that something in special education has changed, and that it would be hard to imagine anyone who could sustain a life-long career in the field. Because of this belief Chuck was not sorry or apologetic for his decision to leave special education. Like many of the other teachers he missed the kids (at least some of the kids) and the *idea* of being a special education teacher. In reality, however, he did not actually miss *being* a special education teacher.

Chuck's first barrier hit him during his very first year in the BD program. It had to do with student discipline. It didn't take long for Chuck to figure out that principals

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don't like to have BD kids sent to the office for disciplinary reasons, (at least not very often). That left Chuck and his paraprofessional with some very gray areas regarding student behavior. The unwritten expectations, however, were clear – BD teachers were supposed to have the expertise and skills to deal with discipline problems on their own. Conceptually this made sense to Chuck, but pragmatically it posed some real problems. For Chuck's first three years in special education he was never exactly sure what behaviors to address and what behaviors to ignore. He sought out the help of others, but the answers always came back in phrases like "it depends" or "that's a tough one." After time he decided it was one of the questions that you had to figure out for yourself as a BD teacher. He imagined it would come to him in some kind of holy vision one day if he was patient and worked hard. Unfortunately, it never did.

Chuck carried on as if he knew what he was doing, but nagging insecurities were constantly with him. They made him feel as if at any moment someone would drop by, see what was going on, and shut the place down. Of course nobody did drop by or shut the place down, which brings up Chuck's next major barrier - nobody dropped by. Chuck corrected himself and admitted that various people dropped by from time to time, but they tended to be people who couldn't do much to help him adjust to the barriers he was facing. In fact, they were often people who wanted something from him. Sometimes they wanted paperwork, sometimes they brought warnings of potential new students, and sometimes they wanted to know what he planned to do about the latest atrocity one of his students had committed in the hall, or the perhaps the parking lot. Most of the time these visits simply added to the pressures he was already feeling. Chuck remembers it was like

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being loaded onto a boat, then having someone push your out into rough water, and it isn't until the shore is almost out of sight that you realize you only have one oar and no compass to speak of. Chuck talked a lot about those feelings of isolation. They came and went as he tried various remedies, but he always felt like there was no rope tying his program to shore.

By the end of Chuck's seventh year in special education definite signs of withdrawal began to set in. He had pretty much given up on somebody rescuing him, so he began to take a different tact. By this point Chuck felt himself burning out and he knew drastic measures were in order if he had any hopes of hanging on to what little job satisfaction he had left. In his eighth year Chuck talked his principal into letting him move his classroom into the old auto shop (which had been abandoned to make way for a more college-bound curriculum). The principal was more than happy to oblige. He believed Chuck was an excellent BD teacher and was willing to let him experiment with whatever made him happy. That semester he and his kids debarked from that imaginary boat lost at sea and started their own little island. They painted the walls and made the place look like someone's idea of the perfect bachelor apartment (all of his students were male at the time). For a while it actually worked. The kids liked being in the apartment, and because they were constantly supervised they had fewer behavior problems. They also ended up being integrated in general education classes less and less, so Chuck had fewer hassles with teachers over behavior problems and unfinished assignments. It was all a great relief and a definite boost to his job satisfaction. Life in the BD room was good! They even got rid of the BD label and dubbed the room the "learning center." As

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Chuck told the story, I had visions of a reenactment of Lord of the Flies, by William Golding (1959). I imagined Chuck and the students blowing on conch shells with mud streaks on their faces, running wildly through the halls of the east wing through the abandoned auto shop. It was quite a vision.

Unfortunately, during his ninth (and what was to be his final) year in special education, the story took a little different turn. It was true, the BD students enjoyed not having to deal with the outside world, and at that point in time Chuck was pretty much in the same state of mind. Eventually, however, an ugly truth dawned on him. One day after school, as he was sitting on the "apartment" couch (now completely stained with Pepsi and Mountain Dew residue), he realized he wasn't really preparing the kids for productive lives in the community; he was instead preparing them for prison, or some other kind of equally horrible institutional setting. Where else do you have round-the-clock supervision, no communication with the outside world, and someone to plan your every move? Chuck had inadvertently created his own little prison system, and of course, this was not going to be acceptable in the long run. After weeks of soul searching he privately decided it was time for him to move on. Chuck didn't have the energy to go back and try to reconnect himself and his kids to the rest of the school, and he couldn't stay where he was. So he decided to move forward, and forward for Chuck meant staying in teaching, but not in special education. With a wavering certainty he applied for a physical education position in the district, and despite several weeks of pleading and cajoling from his principal, he was granted his wish. He now teaches middle and high school students how to improve their physical and mental health, and from his

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descriptions of his work I am guessing he is very good at it. In the closing chapter of his story Chuck explained to me that he doesn't regret his years in special education and that he probably learned some of the greatest lessons of his life during that period of his career. He has no plans, however, to return any time soon.

Rhonda

> My students were the best. I loved that part of special education. Kids with mental and physical disabilities have more to teach us than most people can imagine... I taught in special ed. a long time and a part of me will always be a special ed. teacher, but there comes a time when you have to balance your personal life and your health with your job. I'm still kind of surprised that I made the decision... One day it just sort of hit me, you know... that I needed to leave and do something else. All of a sudden retirement seemed too far away considering the feelings I was having. (Rhonda)

Rhonda was the only teacher in the study who worked exclusively with students who had moderate and severe mental and physical disabilities. Many students with these characteristics are now being included in less restrictive special education programs or even in general education classrooms. When Rhonda began her teaching career, however, it was quite typical for these programs to be located in isolated parts of the buildings, or even in buildings other than the school. Rhonda taught for eight years in a portable building before someone suggested it would be better for the students if she moved closer to the mainstream classrooms in the buildings. She can't remember exactly who suggested it, but she thinks it was someone from the Department of Education, maybe in a compliance review. That was fine with Rhonda. She welcomed the change, but she also would have been content to stay out in the portable (which she and her students affectionately referred to as the "can"). It wasn't really until after the move that Rhonda began to have doubts about a life-long career in special education. She of course

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had weathered the challenges that all new teachers go through, gaining confidence, figuring out the system, working with parents, etc. She had also struggled to balance her school life with being the mother of four children of her own, but after a few years she learned to separate the two and create time for both.

It wasn't until her ninth year that Rhonda's job satisfaction began to wane. What seemed like "all at once" Rhonda was expected to take on new roles for which she was not fully prepared. Parents, consultants, and experts (whose names she can no longer recall) suddenly began to take new interest in her program and students. Some factions wanted students to be "fully included" in general education classes. Others wanted students to have vocational training in the special education room but academic training in general classes. What resulted were long, emotional meetings that forced the adults who worked with these students to take sides and form coalitions. The general education teachers were confused and thrown off balance, as was Rhonda in her need to reestablish new relationships with almost everyone. The idea of inclusion was exciting to Rhonda, but the reality was tiring. In looking back Rhonda believes that no one really knew what they were doing during that period. She believes that politically correct rhetoric often took precedence over common sense, and she admitted to getting caught up in the middle of it all. For Rhonda it was a very difficult time. She was forced to abandon a role in which she felt comfortable and competent and take on a role in which she felt confused and conflicted. After a decade of teaching the changes shook both her confidence and her motivation.

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Rhonda's withdrawal was not into special education or out of special education. It was instead away from her own beliefs and values. As the expectations for the inclusion of her students became greater, her ability to think for herself and advocate for her students became weaker. Everyone around her seemed so sure of himself or herself, and she, for the first time in her career, seemed so unsure. By her 12th year in special education she stopped arguing with parents and people from the AEA. She acquiesced to the demands of general education teachers and let others guide her program. In retrospect, Rhonda remembers it as taking the path of least resistance. She knew that some of the programming taking place with her students was not appropriate, but she had become too tired to fight. Looking back, Rhonda now feels many of her gut instincts were correct, and she regrets not taking a stronger stand with many of the so-called experts who were impacting her teaching, but she also knows a lot was learned from that period that would not have been learned in any other way. She let me know in no uncertain terms that she does not regret staying in special education for 14 years, nor does she regret leaving to teach reading after all those years. Rhonda believed it was her responsibility to adjust to the expectations of the system at the time, and it was her job to decide when her talents would be better utilized somewhere else. As to whether she would ever return to special education, Rhonda indicated she has no plans to do so, but that after this many years of teaching and life experience she has learned never to say never.

Bev

> My years in special education were very important to me. I enjoyed the students... There were other things about special ed. that were very difficult for me. There

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> was such a negative image of special ed. that rubbed off on the kids... Teachers didn't want to send their kids to me to take tests because it was not preparing them for "the real world." I wanted to tell them that the real world is probably not going to be as hard for these kids as high school is... My heart broke for those kids. They were so misunderstood. (Bev)

There were certain special educator roles Bev grasped with great warmth and empathy. She loved working with the students. Bev was not afraid to get involved with their lives and their families. She realized from the beginning that their problems were not one-dimensional and involved many facets of their lives. She listened intently to her husband (a career teacher at the local high school) when he ranted and raved about "kids these days" and the students' lack of accountability. Bev tried to make him understand that for many kids success is not so black and white a proposition. Sometimes after a glass of wine and a long conversation Bev believed she was beginning to get through to him. At school Bev was diligent, well respected, and soft-spoken. She provided the general education teachers with neatly organized information on each of her students' strengths and weaknesses and she put the bare bones of their individual education plans in a user-friendly format. The teachers seemed to appreciate the efforts, but Bev wondered how much they really used the information.

Bev spent the first six years of her special education teaching experience trying to figure out the perfect organization system and trying to please those who inspected her paperwork. She kept in close contact with parents and met with students before and after school. Bev always believed, in the back of her mind, that if she could just figure out how to do all the right things, the other teachers and administrators would positively reciprocate with her students. After six years she began to realize that maybe her

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assumption was incorrect. The biggest barrier Bev faced was her role as an advocate for her students. Bev was not good in situations of conflict, and somehow special education seemed to continually be fraught with conflict. When it was just her with the students everything was fine, but when she had to face the other teachers, or an administrator, her anxiety rose and she felt the awful fears of her own adolescence. Bev knew this was an important role. She believed that good special education teachers stood up for their students at any price, but somehow, no matter how much she tried, it was a role she simply couldn't master. The negative attitudes of her colleagues toward her students felt personal to Bev, and she knew she could not keep up this pace for much longer. Bev was tired from the inside out, and by her last year in special education she was merely trying to survive.

Bev's withdrawal from her special education position was rapid. It began with a principal meeting in October. The principal had asked the four Level 1 special education teachers to meet with him in his office to discuss some complaints of the general education faculty. The gist of the meeting was that the special educators were expecting too many accommodations for their students, and that by not expecting the special education students to live up to the same standards as other students we were shortchanging their educational experience and creating a society of irresponsible citizens. The other teachers sputtered and defended themselves, but Bev sat silently. In her mind she almost found it comical that the general education teachers felt so burdened by all of the accommodations they were forced to make. From Bev's perspective they barely spent any time making accommodations. By the end of the meeting Bev had

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concocted a new plan in her head. She wouldn't worry about the general education teachers. She wouldn't ask them to do anything. She would simply do the best she could in the hour or two she saw her students. That was the best she could do, and for the rest of the year that is exactly what she did. On the one hand, the relief of not having to argue with the other teachers or administrators was renewing, but on the other hand she knew in her heart she couldn't teach this way. In order to build a strong educational program for any student it took the collaboration of all the teachers. She knew that, and in the end she could not run away from her own beliefs. After several sleepless nights, with hat in hand, she approached the principal and asked for a transfer out of special education. As with all the other principals, he did his best to encourage her to reconsider, but her mind was made up. The following year Bev began teaching supplementary reading to students in the middle school. The students' needs were similar, but the adult expectations were far different.

Marge

> If you make it in special education twenty years then you have the right to take a few shots, if you know what I mean... I was born to be a BD teacher... for most of the time I was in special ed. I figured I'd retire there. It's different than when I started, though... I feel like fewer people know what they're doing... maybe even care what they're doing. I can't even imagine... if this teacher shortage really hits all the areas ... what that will mean for special ed. It can't be good. (Marge)

Of all the teachers in the study, Marge lasted the longest in special education, (even while teaching in a behavior disorders classroom). I think Marge was right; she was born to teach BD. During the interviews she seemed unflappable. After 20 years of doing something she loved, Marge felt she was "run out of town" by "crap" that had nothing to do with kids, or disabilities, or kids with disabilities. Marge had been in

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special education since almost the beginning, and unlike many of the Rookies and Intermediates in the study, she felt comfortable with the law that made special education a reality, and uncomfortable with how the intent of that law had been misconstrued. The barriers with which Marge struggled were not kid related. She, like the other teachers, acknowledged the challenges of working with students who had disabilities, but also like the others, denied that the kids' needs were what drove her out of the field. Marge sailed through the first 10 years of teaching BD (I'm sure there were some bumps here and there, but that's how Marge remembers it). During her early years the area of behavior disorders was still in its infancy. The other teachers and administrators had never seen anything quite like these students. Many were previously educated in institutional settings and this was their first introduction to a public school. People were basically in awe of Marge. They didn't understand *how* she could do it, or *why* she would do it, but they respected her for it and thanked God that nobody asked *them* to do it! Marge became a kind of folk hero in her building and district. She admits that the kids were fairly self-contained in a large room in the basement of the school. About the only disruption from the BD room to the day-to-day functions of the school came when a teacher would hear shrieking or crashing coming from the lower level, and someone would call down to see if Marge and the gang were still in one piece. Marge had two adults who had been with her since the beginning, and occasions in which they asked for help from outsiders were fairly infrequent. It went that way for at least a decade.

By the 14th or 15th year of her teaching, however, things began to change for Marge. Her long-time paraprofessionals retired, and Marge had trouble finding and

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keeping replacements for them. She started to get students into the program who did not really need to be in a self-contained setting, but who had angered the system in a new era of "no tolerance" and landed there anyway. For the first time in her career Marge was lost. She knew some of these kids needed to be in regular classes but couldn't convince her colleagues to take them in. The climate regarding school violence was hyper-reactive, and suddenly just the *potential* of being dangerous was all it took to be excluded. The respect Marge once felt for doing a thankless job seemed to be replaced by resentment that her students were even allowed to stay in the system at all. Marge countered by trying to educate her colleagues on the rights of students with disabilities and their duty to include these students, but her efforts only seemed to fuel their discontent.

At the same time that she was fighting public sentiment, the special education teachers in her building were dropping like flies. The increased negativity toward any student with behavior problems, coupled with more and more demands on the teachers' time for administrivia and procedure processing, was driving people out of the field in a mass exodus (the likes of which Marge had never seen during her tenure). Suddenly, she was the most senior teacher in the department, a leadership position for which Marge was not prepared. Most of the time Marge liked to go it alone. She had a certain level of camaraderie with her former colleagues in special education, but she never wanted to assume any kind of leadership role within the group. Marge played her own role. She told it like it was and stood up to the oppressors of special education. She said out loud what everyone else was thinking. Marge believed that every group needed somebody

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like that. Now she was in charge of 12-year-old rookies (actually I doubt the teachers were really 12, they just started appearing that way to Marge) who didn't know what they were doing and broke into tears at the drop of a hat. Marge was completely out of her element. She was lost in a sea of nagging politics and smeared mascara – retreat was her only option.

She thinks it was probably during her 16th year when she began her withdrawal. She convinced the principal to let her move to a building off the school grounds (which was not difficult since no one wanted her kids in the building anyway). She self-contained the students whether they needed it or not, and she rationalized her decision by incorporating community involvement into their schedules. In other words, they went to restaurants together, shopped for their supplies at a nearby grocery store, and went on the occasional field trip to a museum or movie theater. It wasn't exactly a substitute for the high school experience, but it kept them (and Marge) away from the madness of the high school. It worked for a while, but eventually the madness caught up with her, and she had inspectors, regulators, and assorted other "dried-up" professionals sniffing around her door. There was no place left to hide. No more retreats for Marge. She walked like a zombie through her last few years until one January she got the news from the central office that the funding for the off-site rent been rescinded, and she and the kids would have to return to the high school building. They had a nice space for her right next to the band room. Marge got a headache just thinking about it. Although Marge didn't really believe in signs, this one seemed real. Without mentioning it to anyone, Marge filled out an application for an at-risk position that was opening up at the middle school the

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following year. She gave no explanation to her principal or the faculty. After 20 years in a job for which she was born, Marge walked out; no parties, no fanfare, and no good-byes.

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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

When my four-year old niece Olivia is old enough to make decisions about her work, what career will she choose to define her identity? The occupation of princess will probably not be available, but what about teaching? What will teaching look like in twenty years? What about the field of special education? Will it be thriving? Will it still exist? How will her generation view work, and how will that view differ from the perspective of her Generation X parents and Baby Boomer grandparents? The answers to those questions are dependent on our ability to ask the right questions and listen intently to teachers in our current workforce.

The future of educating children with disabilities through quality programming is in serious jeopardy but the solutions may not seem as daunting as I once imagined. After listening to the stories of the 12 former special education teachers I was actually surprised by many aspects of their decisions to leave the field of special education. In the back of my mind I feared the teachers would focus their job dissatisfaction on the students themselves. I feared they would tell me it was just too hard to deal with students who had problems day after day (and in some aspects of their experiences they did relate those things). In the end, however, it was not the needs of students that pushed the 12 teachers into their final decisions to leave the field of special education. It was, instead, the behavior of adults that most influenced their decisions. Having worked with adults in public education for many years I am aware how difficult it is to change adult behavior, but that goal is certainly more attainable than expecting to change the needs of students.

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As the hours of the interviews and tape recordings went by I began to let down my defenses enough to understand the issues each special educator faced on a deeper level. By taking the time to really listen to the teachers' stories, with both patience and thoughtfulness, the factors that influenced the teachers' decisions to leave seemed more complex but ultimately more clear.

Research Questions Revisited

The adjustment of an individual to a job and in turn the adjustment of a job to an individual was the dance explored in this inquiry. It was a dance of tensions between the expectations of the individual and the expectations of the system as one seeks to shape and modify the other into a mutually gratifying social contract. For some the dance was a tango, for others more of a waltz. The inquiry was about the processes, contexts, expectations, and adjustments of a group of special educators as they reflected on their decisions to leave the field of special education. The issues and focus of the study were presented in two questions:

1. What impacts special education teachers' decisions to leave the field of special education? and

2. What are the events and activities that lead up to special education teachers' decisions to leave the field of special education?

Results

The 12 teachers in the study were former quality special educators who chose to transfer to general education after varying lengths of time in special education. I listened to and analyzed their stories through a series of interviews over the span of one year.

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After analyzing the factors that influenced the teachers' decisions to leave the field of special education and documenting the events that led up to their final departure, four themes emerged: intangible rewards (support, value, respect, and growth); personal influence; view of work; and work adjustment. These themes led me to a number of observations.

Intangible Rewards

In the area of intangible rewards (support, value, respect, and growth) the 12 former special educators in the study:

- did not perceive that they got enough respect by general education teachers and parents to remain in the field;
- did not perceive that they got enough support from their supervisors to remain in the field;
- believed when their supervisor inquired about how things were going, what he or she was really asking was "how are you performing" and "how are your students performing" not "how do you like your job" or " are you and your job a good fit";
- saw legal threats, regulatory procedures, and paperwork as influential factors in their decisions to leave but only in the sense that they felt a lack of respect from AEA/DE staff and they resented time spent on those activities which robbed them of their opportunities to grow professionally with regard to best practices and student issues; and
- personalized the negative view of special education as a field, (projected by the media, administration, and general education teachers), until it became an influential part of their decision to leave the field.

Personal Influence

In the area of personal influence the 12 teachers in the study:

- felt powerless to influence system adjustments that might improve their job satisfaction and did not believe the system would make those adjustments on its own;
- believed *they alone* were responsible for their job satisfaction;

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- did not share their job dissatisfaction with their supervisors until they had made an intractable decision to leave the field; and
- did not feel connected to the real work of the school.

View of Work

In their view of work the 12 teachers in the study:

- saw themselves staying in education as a career (perhaps with supplemental income from entrepreneurial ventures);
- projected a vision for their future that remained static, (ten years down the road they imagined themselves in their *exact* current context, except older and even more tired, which made their vision of the future both negative and frightening);
- saw their decision to remain in special education as an accept or reject situation with no middle ground; and
- reported that student issues impacted their day-to-day job satisfaction but were not of major influence in their decisions to leave the field.

Work Adjustment

In the area of work adjustment the 12 teachers in the study:

- were able to recognize and identify milestone events and activities leading up to their departure (through reflection), which could then be identified as a barrier, adjustment, or sign of withdrawal;
- believed the system made minimum efforts to ensure a good fit between the individual and the job beyond the hiring and initial induction process;
- went through a variable series of adjustments prior to their final decisions, which lasted for months or years; and
- reported the unwritten, informal, social contracts they faced in starting their new positions were more problematic and influential than the formal contracts.

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Results and Prior Resarch

Some of the results of this inquiry coincide with prior research and literature and some push the conclusions of prior research to a different level. This study confirmed public education is facing a serious shortage of special education teachers, which has begun, and will continue, to negatively impact the quality of education for students with disabilities and the pubic education system as a whole (Billingsley, 1993; Billingsley et al., 1993; Billingsley et al., 1995; Boe et al., 1996). The 12 teachers in the study cited numerous concerns about special education teacher attrition in their school districts and indicated their belief that the situation was worsening. The literature also points out the retention of special education teachers (and teachers in general) is often overlooked in public education (Merrow, 1999; Peske et al., 2001). The 12 teachers in this inquiry would agree with the literature and did not perceive any productive system measures to encourage or ensure the retention of a quality special education staff. In fact, they cited many system directives as playing a major role in their decision not remain in the field of special education

In the area of special educator job satisfaction the results of this inquiry diverged from prior research on several levels. The literature consistently cites overwhelming class size, inadequate resources, and incomplete preparation as major barriers in special educators' ability to be effective and satisfied in the field (Billingsley, 1993; Billingsley et al., 1995). In this inquiry the teachers did not believe these aspects of their jobs were of high importance in their decisions to leave. They occasionally spoke of these issues but believed that adjustments could be made to overcome these types of barriers. Prior

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studies also consistently point to the intensity and range of student needs as a major contributor to the dissatisfaction of special educators (Billingsley, 1993; Boe et al., 1997). In this inquiry, although the teachers recognized the challenge of working with students who have disabilities, they were adamant they did not leave because of the students.

One area in which this inquiry both agreed and disagreed with prior research dealt with issues of paperwork, regulatory procedures, and legal processes. The literature cites these aspects of special education to be serious factors in special educators' dissatisfaction with the field (Billingsley, 1993). The 1997 amendments to the public law governing special education also addressed a need for the reduction of paperwork (although little was accomplished toward this end) and the current data gathering process for the next reauthorization indicates the issue is resurfacing again. The results of the current inquiry would concur with those findings but for very different reasons.

Several prior researchers (Billingsley, 1993; Brownell & Smith, 1992; Casey, 1992) indicated a need for more in-depth interviews of teachers to go beyond the surface issues of forced-choice survey options. This inquiry provided such a format and uncovered deeper reasons why paperwork, regulatory procedures, and legal processes were such important dissatisfiers for special educators. The results of prior research assumed the quantity (or the mere existence) of paperwork was the major issue. This inquiry found it was, instead, the lack of respect with which the teachers were treated (by those regulating these aspects of special education) that influenced their decisions to leave the field coupled with the professional growth time wasted on procedural issues. The 12 teachers in this inquiry were not opposed to doing meaningful paperwork or

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complying with laws they believed ultimately protected students with disabilities. They were however, opposed to what they termed the "circus" of compliance proceedings that have become inextricably linked with the field of special education (primarily because of the way they were treated with regard to those proceedings). In other words, the core of the teachers' dissatisfaction had to do with *how* the teachers were treated and not necessarily in *what* they were being asked to do.

The literature on work adjustment was not specific to special educators but many results of this study were congruent with prior literature and research in this area. Throughout this inquiry it became evident that "when the fit between the individual and system is poor, one or both suffer" (Bolman & Deal, 1997, p.102). The concept of job satisfaction as characterized by Gini (2000) was also demonstrated by the teachers in their need for intangible rewards (respect, support, value, and growth) and basic human needs (Hershenson, 2001; Maslow, 1970). The teachers echoed many of the seven characteristics of meaningful work set out by Hakim (1994) emphasizing the importance of doing meaningful work, feeling respected by colleagues and customers, feeling a sense of excellence in work, playing a productive role in the organization, and knowing that your contribution makes a difference in the lives of students. The results of this inquiry also demonstrated that the teachers went through many identifiable signs of psychological and physical withdrawal prior to leaving their positions, building on the work of Argyris (1964).

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Conclusions

In many ways the field of special education may be the "canary in the coal mine" with regard to public education's future challenge to retain quality teachers. In other ways special education has its unique challenges that are specific to the field. Special education teachers are not a homogeneous group. At the time I chose the sample for this study I was able to pick from a wide pool of teachers who were former special educators, some with as much as 20 years of teaching experience. If this inquiry had taken place even ten years in the future, however, my choices would have probably been much more limited. The Baby Boomers are slowly but surely retiring from the teaching ranks, being replaced by a generation of workers who view work seriously but demand that the system meet their needs and expectations in a more direct way then their predecessors. It is critical as educators we understand and keep pace with changing attitudes about work and that we don't assume there will always be a quality teaching pool from which to choose.

The 12 teachers in this inquiry provided a glimpse into the barriers that existed for them as special educators and their struggles to adjust to the expectations of the system. The youngest teachers in this study stayed in special education the shortest amount of time, which is becoming typical of special educators across the nation. They made their decisions to leave faster and with more certainty then did those veterans of the prior generation. This would be parallel to their counterparts in other occupations who expect to change jobs several times within their careers in pursuit of a good fit between the individual and the job. As Doug Miller points out in The Organization of the Future:

> On the one hand, the organization has placed its bets on results rather than on work. On the other hand, the individual has said what matters is meaningful work

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> and growth, whether it occurs in a particular organization or a series of organizations. Studies have shown that young people don't expect, nor do they necessarily want, cradle-to-grave job security in a traditional hierarchy. What younger workers want is an environment in which they can grow, acquire skills, and increase the value of their work. (p. 122)

In 10 years it will be difficult to listen to the stories of a group of veteran special educators because at the current rate of attrition they may not exist.

The major themes that emerged from the 12 teachers' stories in this inquiry dealt mainly with issues of respect, value, support, and growth as seen through the teachers' view of work and their ability to adjust to system expectations. The sample teachers in this study were purposefully chosen because they did not leave the field due to low pay, advancement, or other more tangible rewards. A surprising finding in the study is they also did not leave the field because of student issues. Although all the teachers in the study talked about the challenging needs of students and admitted that those challenges impacted their day-to-day job satisfaction, student issues did not directly impact the teachers' decision to leave the field.

What did impact their decisions was the lack of respect and support they often felt from colleagues, parents, supervisors, and regulatory personnel regarding procedural issues, paperwork, legal threats, collaboration efforts, and acceptance of themselves and their students as valuable contributors to the system. Time was also a critical factor. All the teachers resented the amount of time they were forced to spend on what they termed the "nonkid crap" of special education. These activities reduced their time to spend on issues of student learning and ultimately robbed them of needed opportunities to learn

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and grow as professionals. These nonkid activities also made it difficult for many of the teachers to balance a healthy personal life with a healthy work life, which, (particularly for the younger teachers) was ultimately a deal breaker.

Implications of the Inquiry

The 12 teachers in this inquiry are not supposed to represent all teachers or even all special education teachers. As I listened to the stories and analyzed them both individually and collectively, however, I found many implications for my own behavior as a supervisor and as someone who is charged with supporting the retention of quality special educators. In the area of support, value, respect, and growth it became clear to me that the system must create a different work environment for these teachers. Special educators must immediately be able to recognize where and how they fit in the organization and what value they bring to the system. Principals and supervisors can play an influential role in creating such an environment by overtly showing an interest in the job satisfaction of special education teachers (both novice and veteran) and by assisting the teachers in making clear connections between their work in special education and the work of the building and district. Principals might also be able to create a more welcoming climate for special educators by working with whole faculties on issues of inclusion (both student and adult) and by seeking out for themselves and their staff a greater understanding and knowledge of special education.

There are also implications for special education teachers. None of the 12 teachers in the study did a very good job of monitoring their own job satisfaction or of seeking out people within the system who could assist them with adjustments. Each

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waited until they had made an intractable decision to leave the field before really talking to their principal about their job dissatisfaction. At that point it seemed to be too late for the principal to intervene. Just as supervisors must make job satisfaction an overt issue when dealing with the teachers – teachers must learn to advocate for themselves and allow the system to make adjustments based on their feedback. While it was true that many of the principals in this study could have been more observant of the teachers' waning job satisfaction, it is not reasonable to expect a supervisor to be clairvoyant. Special educators must learn to share job issues with their supervisors in a positive and productive manner. This also holds implications for preservice institutions. Special educators need more then technical training in student learning during their preservice experience. They also need preparation in how to deal with adult issues that will predictably surface for most special educators during their careers.

Throughout their stories the teachers talked about the "nonkid" oriented "stuff," "crap," and "baggage," attached to special education and how it robbed them of their time to spend on what they termed "real" student learning issues. It included the inspection of paperwork, enforcement of procedure manuals, legal policies, etc. As many of the teachers alluded to in the study these things have somehow become inextricably "attached" to special education, and the teachers felt it was an accept or reject proposition; either you accepted the "baggage" as part of the job or you moved out of the field. It was these nonkid things that had the highest impact on their decisions to leave the field. This would seem to have great implications for those who are charged with the implementation of these activities. Having been one those people I understand the

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dilemma surrounding the issue. Many of these things have their roots in legal mandates and protect students' rights on a grander scale (unfortunately by the time things reach the special educator the grandness is all but lost). This causes those in charge of overseeing these activities to throw their hands up in frustration and to proclaim they have no choice; it's a dirty job but somebody has to do it! They are only partly right, however. Some of the activities are required and must be done, but *how* they are done is certainly not mandated. The 12 teachers in this study consistently felt like they were treated with disrespect by those involved in various aspects of the process, and that kind of behavior is certainly not mandated. Although it may at first glance seem like an insurmountable task, the dismantling of the "baggage" of special education is possible and if the 12 teachers in this study are any indication of the future, it is necessary.

Suggestions for Future Research

Throughout the interviews several suggestions for future research emerged. In charting the work adjustment of special education teachers who *left* the field I believe it would be also be interesting to chart the work adjustment of special educators who have *remained* in the field. The ability of veteran special educators to make adjustments over time would possibly shed light on why special education teachers *stay* in the field. It would also be interesting to chart the work adjustment of *general education* teachers who have stayed in the field and those who have left teaching altogether. Another possible extension of the study would be to compare the work adjustment and job satisfaction of teachers at various points in their careers or to compare the job satisfaction of teachers in conjunction with their performance over time.

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Outside the teaching ranks I had many questions about how principals and supervisors view teacher job satisfaction. In this inquiry the teachers took sole responsibility for their own job satisfaction and perceived that their supervisors were not specifically interested in or could not directly influence their job satisfaction. My incidental meeting with a couple of principals (described in the Prologue) peaked my interest in whether the teachers were correct in their perceptions. A study exploring supervisor perceptions of their role in creating or maintaining teacher job satisfaction could provide further insight into the problem of teacher retention.

Closing

The dance between the expectations of 12 special education teachers and their work environments was one of passion, laughter, regret, and renewal. All 12 teachers continue to be valuable members of the public school system but their departure from special education is a loss to the field and to the system in general. As I listened to the teachers' stories, I was captured by moments in which the system might have intervened, possibly adjusting to what the teachers needed at the time. Would it have been enough to keep them in special education? The answer is unclear but the reflections of the teachers shed light on how those adjustments might look and when they need to take place. In order to retain quality special educators it is clear that someone in the system must take an active interest in their job satisfaction and must allow the system to make continual adjustments throughout the entire career of the teachers. Mentoring and induction programs during the first years of a teacher's career are simply not enough. The process must be ongoing and overt. Teachers come into the field of special education with great

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enthusiasm and emotional connection. The system must in turn create an environment where they (and all workers) understand their place within the system and can easily find the value in their work. If given the respect they deserve, the support they need, and the opportunities for professional growth which they desire, then (and only then) will we able to stop the leak in the special education teacher retention pool and provide quality special educational programming for students now, and in the future.

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EPILOGUE:

AFTERTHOUGHTS

Background:

It is the end of August one year later. Jane Hall has completed her study. The annual administrators' conference is about to begin.

Characters:

Annette Davis: Currently a teacher of middle school social studies in a small school district adjacent to Dan's. Wife of Dan, attending the conference as a guest. Taught with Jane Hall many years ago.

Jane Hall: Administrator and graduate student currently completing a doctoral program at a nearby university. Taught with Annette many years ago.

ACT II

Setting:

Jane and Annette run into each other in the lobby of the hotel where the conference is being held. They wait for the elevator and ride up the together.

Jane: Annette. [*Looking toward the registration desk*] Over here. [*Gestures to a woman in jeans and a blue tee shirt with "Everything I know I learned from my teacher" etched on the front*]

Annette: Well look what the cat drug in. Is Kevin with you?

Jane: He's coming tomorrow. Where's Dan?

Annette: He and Paul have a booth this year. They're on the third floor setting up.

Jane: Are you headed up? [*Points to the elevator*] The elevators are unbelievably slow.

Annette: Yes, I'm in room 2106. I'll ride up with you. I was hoping I'd run into you. I've thought about your dissertation since we talked last year. Did you get finished?

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Jane: Yes, thank God. I defended in June. I think I have nerve damage in my hands from all that typing.

Annette: I'm really interested in what you found out. Our little conversation last year made me think about my own situation.

Jane: Well, it turns out our little conversation from last year made it into the dissertation. I used it as the prologue to set the tone for the paper. It reads as sort of a play with all of us as the characters.

Annette: Really? You can do that in a dissertation? What did I say, I can't remember? I hope it was something profound.

Jane: It was in a way. You said that you didn't leave special education because of the kids. You left because of the crap.

Annette: Crap! [*Drops part of her luggage*] I used the word crap! Hopefully you didn't quote me directly.

Jane: Actually, I did. Your comments turned out to be very prophetic. The other teachers talked about the same thing. They used the word crap frequently. Some of them used much worse. I didn't print everything. "The crap attached to special education" turned out to be a major theme. [*Pause*] Don't worry, [*puts hand on Annette's shoulder*] I used pseudonyms to protect your anonymity.

Annette: Good. I'd hate to be forever quoted as using the word crap.

Jane: It turned out that your feelings were very similar to the 12 teachers I studied. They had their daily struggles with kids, but in the end that's not what made them transfer.

Annette: Were you surprised by that?

Jane: Yea, I was. [*Pause*] I guess in the back of my mind I was really afraid it would be about the kids. I was afraid they were just too much of a challenge to tackle over a whole career. I was really excited that it wasn't about the kids. It's made me think in a different direction.

Annette: Toward the crap?

Jane: Exactly. Toward the crap.

Annette: So what exactly did they say about it?

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Jane: I wasn't surprised by many of the things they identified as barriers – paperwork, integration problems, collaboration problems, parent problems... but I was surprised about what was beneath each of those barriers.

Annette: [*Elevator door opens to reveal an empty elevator*] Finally. What floor are you on? [*Holds finger by control panel*]

Jane: I'm on your floor. [*Annette pushes 20*]

Annette: So what surprised you?

Jane: Well, it wasn't so much a surprise as it was something I hadn't thought enough about. The teachers hated the paperwork and regulatory procedures [*Annette groans in agreement*] but not for the reasons I might have thought.

Annette: What do you mean?

Jane: They hated those things because of the way other people treated them when it came to those things. They hated how disrespectful people at the district central office were, and the AEA and DE when they inspected their paperwork or got involved in a legal dispute.

Annette: Ouch, that must have hurt a little for you, coming from some of those positions.

Jane: It did. It took me about 20 hours of interviews before I let down my defenses and really started listening to what they were saying.

Annette: What else? [*Elevator door opens and both step out*]

Jane: They resented having to give up their professional growth time to constantly go to meetings about forms and procedure manuals.

Annette: It's all coming back to me now. We may have to go for a drink soon. What else?

Jane: The general ed. teachers were a major barrier. They described it as being treated like they were ad-ons or extensions of their kids – and their kids weren't being treated well.

Annette: Now *I'm* starting to squirm. What did the gen. ed. teachers do to make them feel that way?

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Jane: Typical things like making it difficult to integrate kids or not making accommodations for kids or dumping kids back on the special ed. teacher.

Annette: I try not to do that.

Jane: I'm sure you do – but there were other things too. They didn't really feel connected to the building or the district. They didn't feel like they really belonged. They talked about being sent "down the hall" or to the "cafeteria" during teacher inservice times. They felt like the other teachers were talking about teaching and learning and they were talking about clerical "crap."

Annette: You know we had an early dismissal yesterday in our district about the new reading standards. Now that you mention it I saw the special ed. teachers headed for the library. [*Pause*] Now I really need a drink. What else?

Jane: They didn't tell anybody how they were feeling about their jobs, at least not anybody who might be able to help them. They said the same things you said about your job satisfaction.

Annette: What did I say? Please tell me I didn't use the word crap again.

Jane: [*Smiling*] No. You didn't. When Cindy asked you if the principal could have helped with your job satisfaction you said, "I figured that *my* job satisfaction was *my* job satisfaction."

Annette: I sound like an illiterate idiot. Please stop quoting me in all future publications!

Jane: No. You were right on the mark. The teachers in the study thought the same thing. I even asked them whether their principal ever asked them "how are you doing?" or "how was it going?"

Annette: Please tell me they said yes.

Jane: They did say yes, but their interpretation of what the principals or supervisors were asking really threw me for a loop.

Annette: What did they think?

Jane: They thought the principal was asking them how they were *performing* or how their students were *performing*. They didn't think the principal was

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really asking about how they liked their job or how good a fit their job was for them. They told the principal they were "good" because they thought they *were* performing well.

Annette: That's really interesting. What do *you* think the principals meant?

Jane: Well, I can't say from this study because I didn't interview their principals, but I know that I've probably asked my staff how they were doing a few thousand times. At the time I was assuming I was asking about their job satisfaction, but who knows what they were thinking? Since that part of the study I have been very explicit with the people I supervise about my interest in their job satisfaction. I think some of the younger ones think I'm a little crazy.

Annette: Dan and Paul will want to hear about that piece. [*Pause*] My sister has a son who looks like he's going to need some special ed. help by the time he starts school. Are there going to be any good special education teachers left?

Jane: A lot are retiring and a lot are transferring. We certainly have to protect the ones we have left.

Annette: And what about the special ed. crap issue? That seems like a monster. How do make a dent in something that out-of-control? How can you change people who are so entrenched in that history? When I was a special ed. teacher I thought I had to just accept all of that stuff, (notice I didn't use that other word just in case you're tape recording this conversation without me knowing it). Can anybody really change it?

Jane: It's probably not realistic to think that you can just get rid of it but let's face it, we made this stuff the way it is. The baggage attached to special ed. isn't an act of God or the result of global warming. The system of public education created this monster and I believe that anything we can create – we can uncreate.

Annette: I'll drink to that! I'll meet you by the pool in 20 minutes and we'll dismantle the whole system together. [*Opens door to room*]

Jane: I'll get my suit and meet you there.

Stage goes to black.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to be in a research study pertaining to the retention of quality special education teachers in the field of special education. You were selected as a possible participant because of your background in the field of special education. Jane Caraway, a doctoral graduate student at the University of Northern Iowa in the area of Educational Leadership, is conducting this study.

Background and Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to explore special educators' decisions to leave or stay in the field of special education. As you are probably aware Iowa is facing a serious shortage of special education teachers, which appears to be worsening. Your participation in this research will help to identify why it is so difficult to retain teachers in this area, and may assist in identifying measures to increase the retention of quality special education teachers in the field.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study you will be interviewed in a one-on-one situation at a site mutually agreed upon by the researcher and yourself for approximately two hours per session for up to three sessions. During those times you will be given a series of open-ended questions about your career decisions to leave or stay in special education. You need only answer those questions with which you feel comfortable. It is possible you may be contacted by electronic mail or phone for follow-up questions as the study progresses over the next year.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study: All data collected for the study will be in the form of field notes from a single researcher. All data will be presented without revealing the names of the participants. Any quotes used from individual participants will be described using a fictitious name and setting. You will not receive any direct compensation from this study; however, your participation may assist in addressing the problem of maintaining quality special education teachers in public education. Your participation in this study is voluntary and can be terminated at any time.

Contacts: Jane Caraway's faculty advisor is Susan Etscheidt, 655 Schindler Education Center, University of Northern Iowa, (319) 273-6061. You may also contact the Office of Human Subjects Coordinator, UNI, (319) 273-2748, if you have any questions. Jane Caraway can be reached at (319) 366-4636, e-mail: jcaraway1@aol.com.

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of the Investigator: _____

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APPENDIX B

JOB SATISFACTION DEFINITIONS BY THE 12 TEACHERS

Rose:	Being satisfied with the importance of your work and your competence; feeling like you can also have a satisfying personal life at the same time.
Jed:	Having your job and your life fit together in a way that makes sense to both.
Grace:	Caring about your work and feeling like you are doing something meaningful.
Elizabeth:	To care about what you are doing and feel like you and your job are a good fit.
Meg	To like your work and fell a part of a bigger system: connected.
Becky	To be relatively happy in your job. I guess to find it fulfilling and enjoyable most of the time.
Mary	Wanting to go to work in the morning because you know you are doing something valuable.
Joanna	To know you are doing a good job at something you enjoy doing. Maybe not every minute, but most of the time.
Chuck	To like and be respected for your work.
Rhonda	An enjoyment of your job and a feeling that your work means something.
Bev:	Job satisfaction is wanting to go to work because you know you are needed, your job is important in the scheme of things and you are good at what you do.
Marge:	Knowing you are doing the right work at the right time.

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APPENDIX C

INDIVIDUAL WORK ADJUSTMENT CHARTS

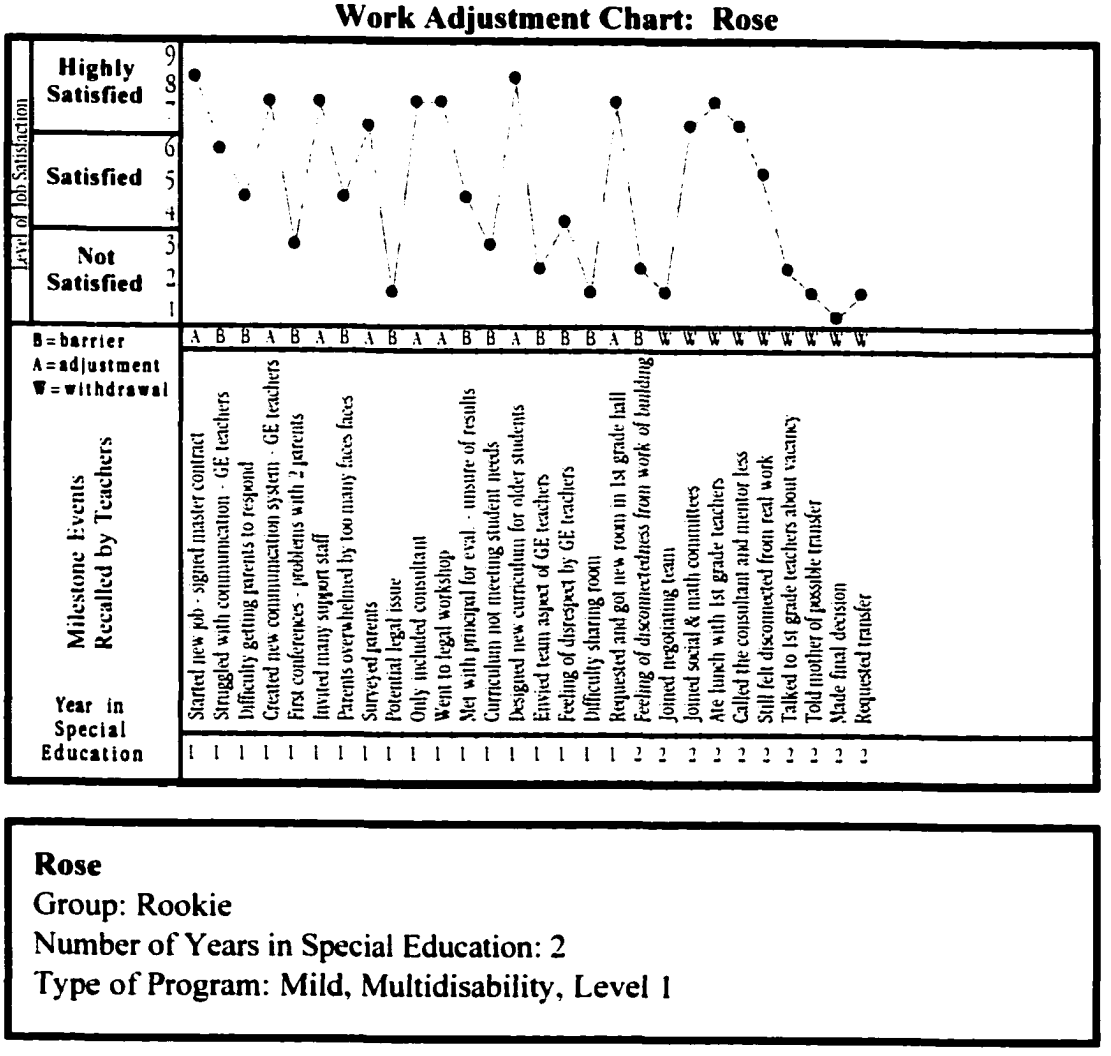

Figure 8. Work adjustment chart: Rose.

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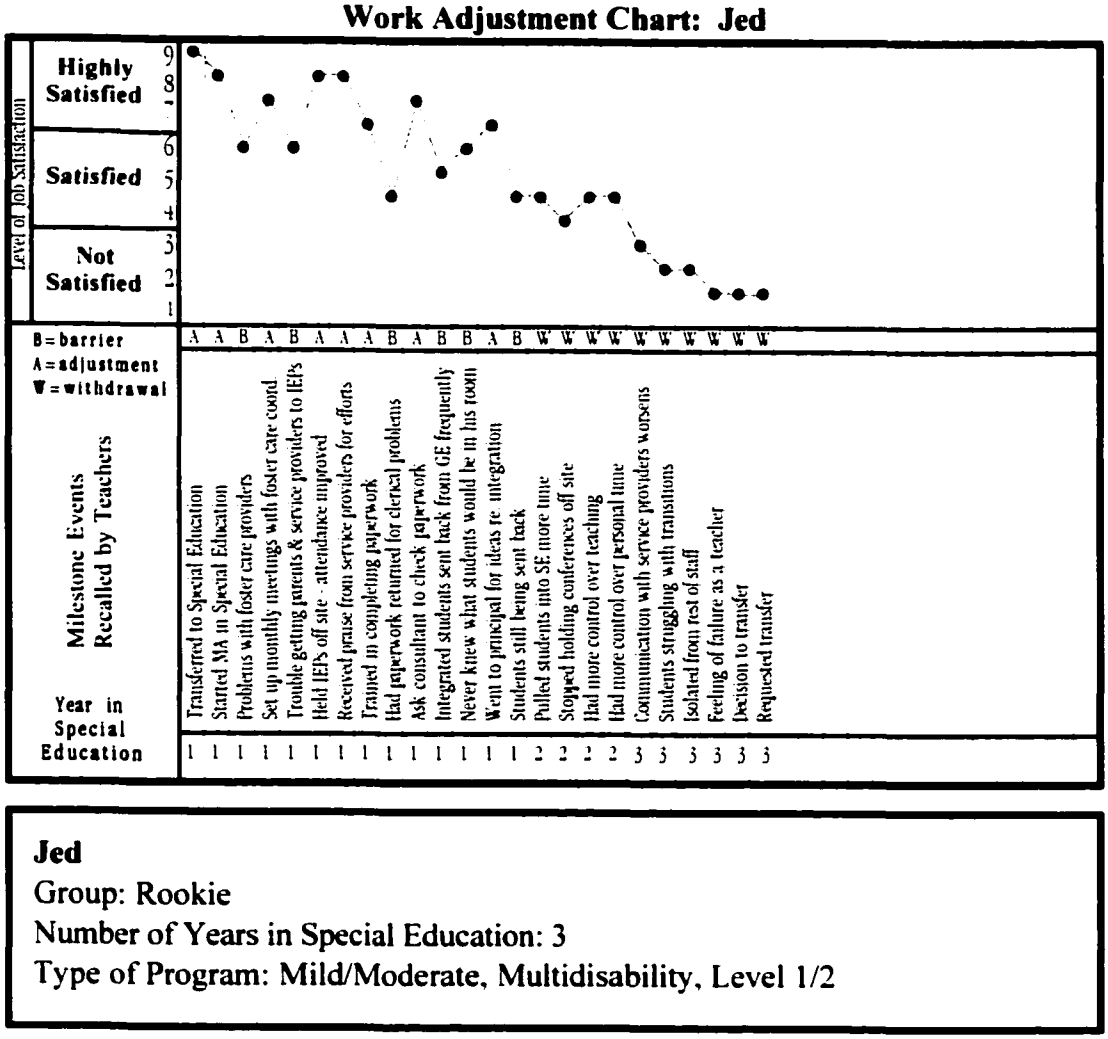

Figure 9. Work adjustment chart: Jed.

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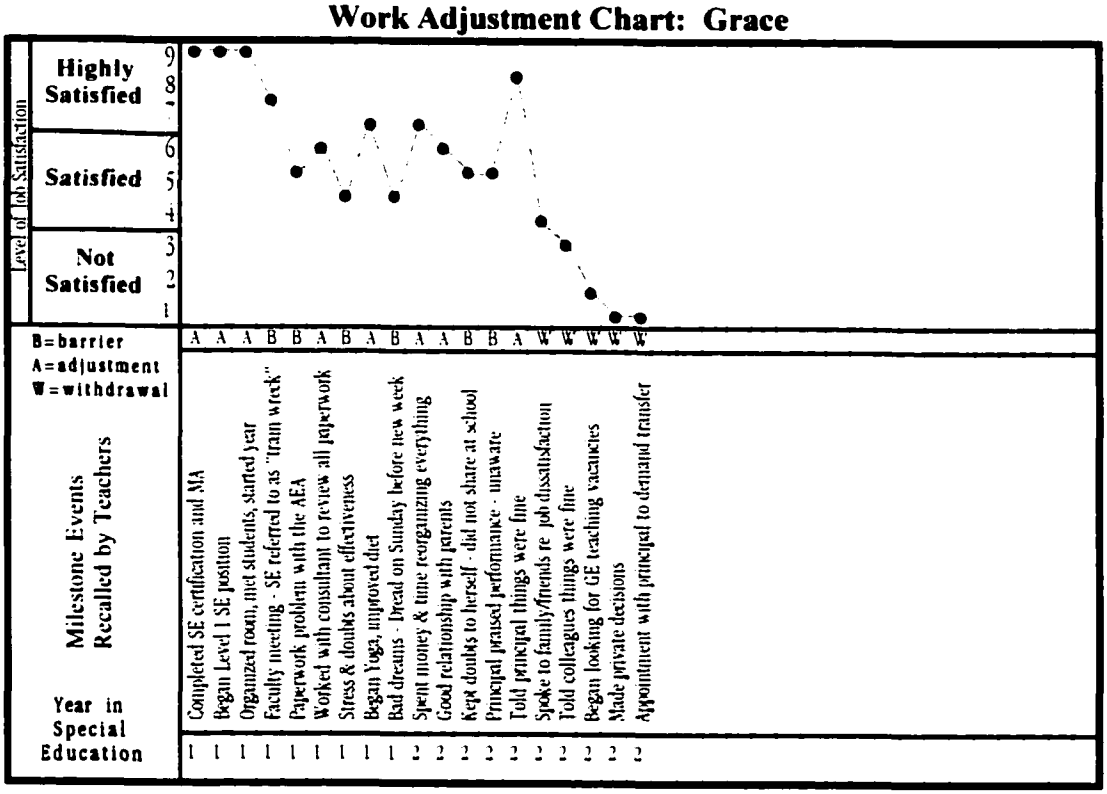

Figure 10. Work adjustment chart: Grace.

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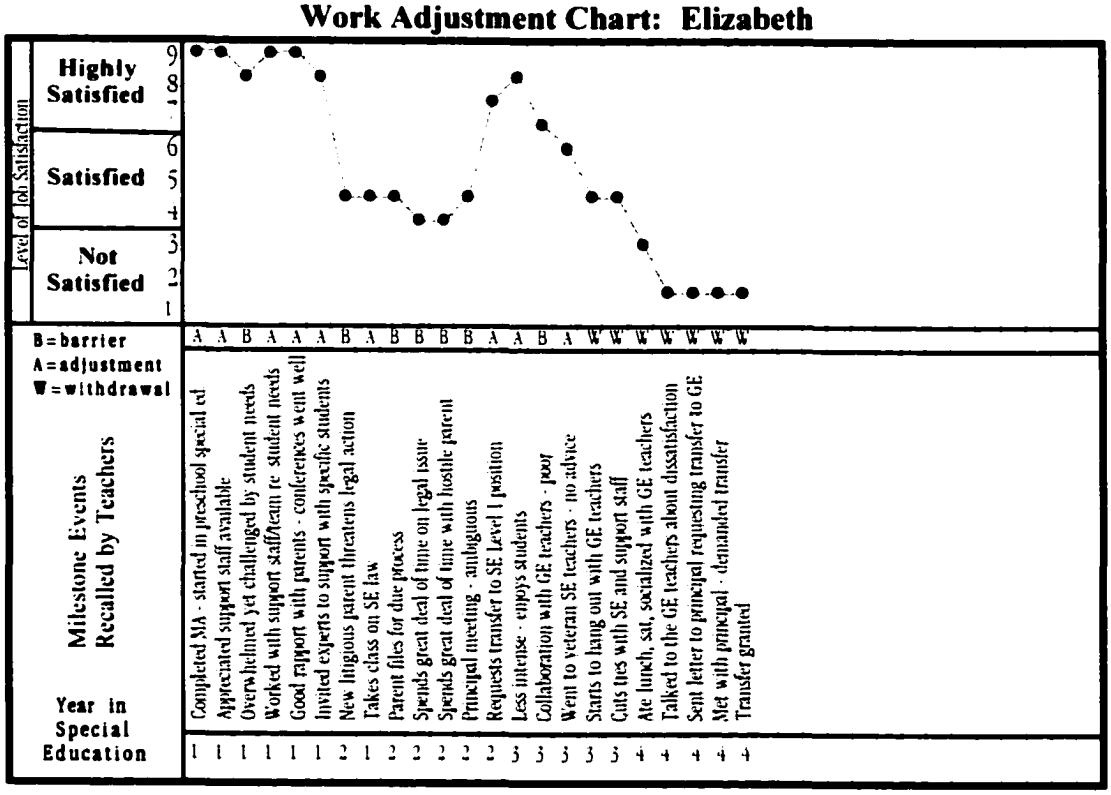

Elizabeth
Group: Rookie
Number of Years in Special Education: 4 (2 preschool, 2 elementary)
Type of Program: Moderate/Mild, Multidisability, Level 2/1

Figure 11. Work adjustment chart: Elizabeth.

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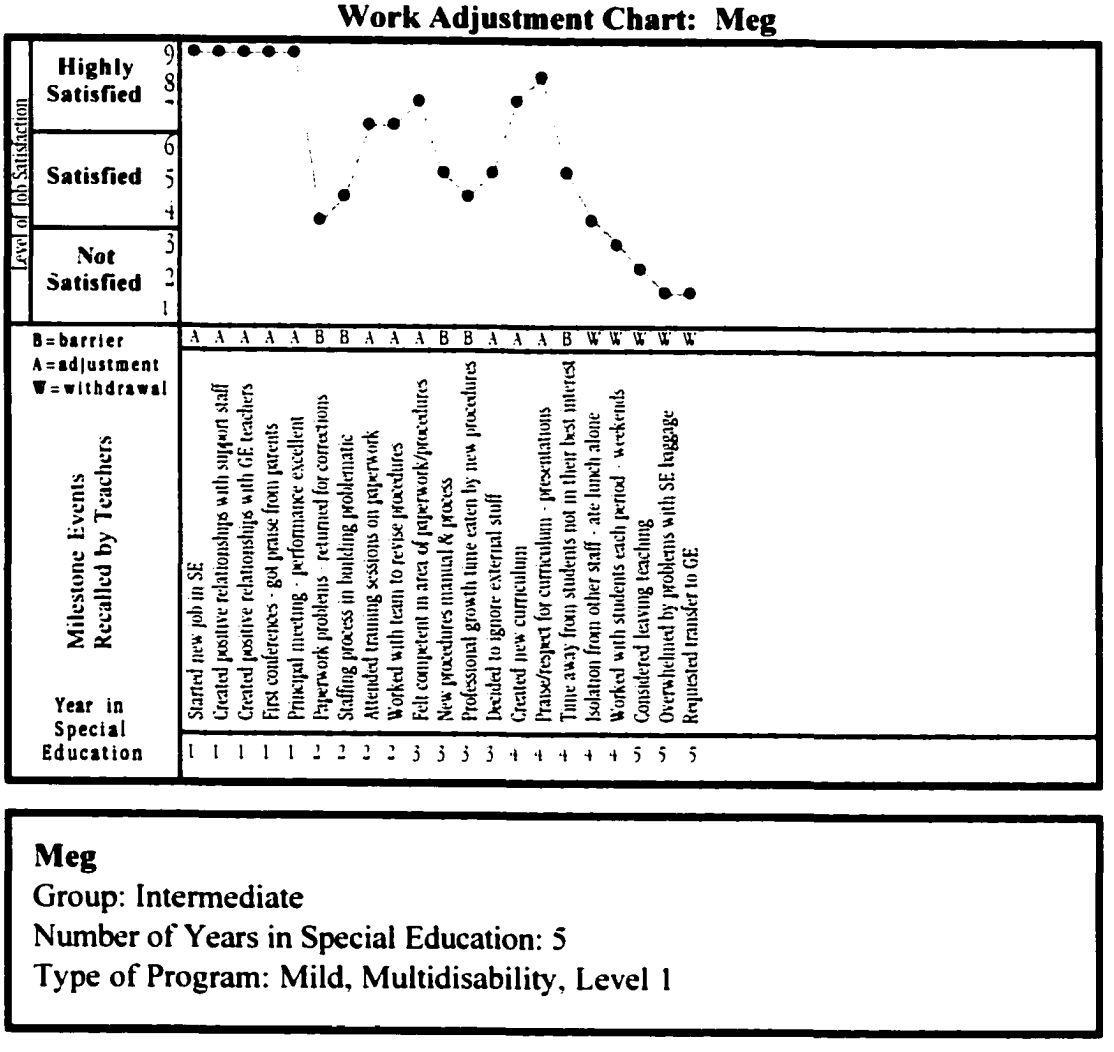

Figure 12. Work adjustment chart: Meg.

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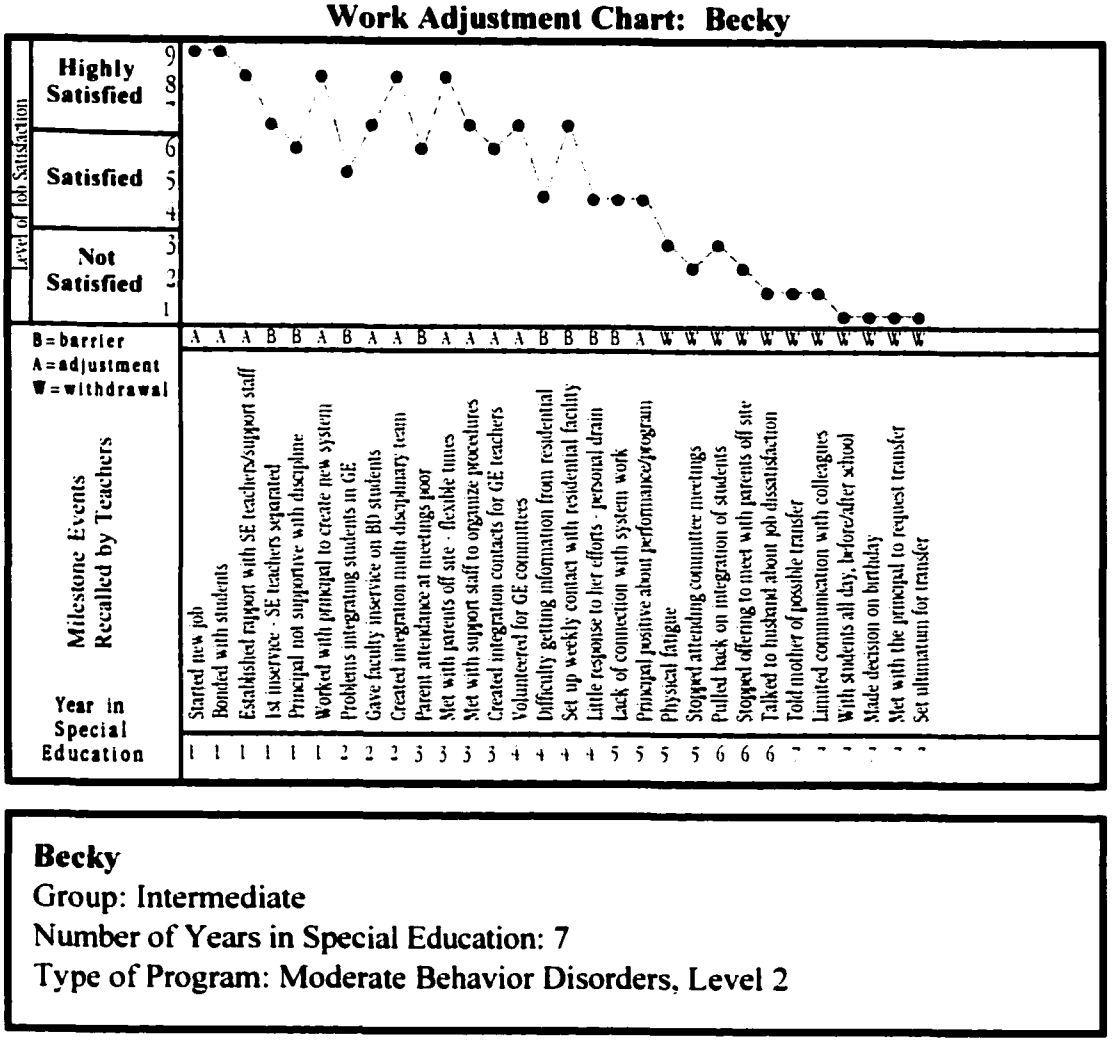

Figure 13. Work adjustment chart: Becky.

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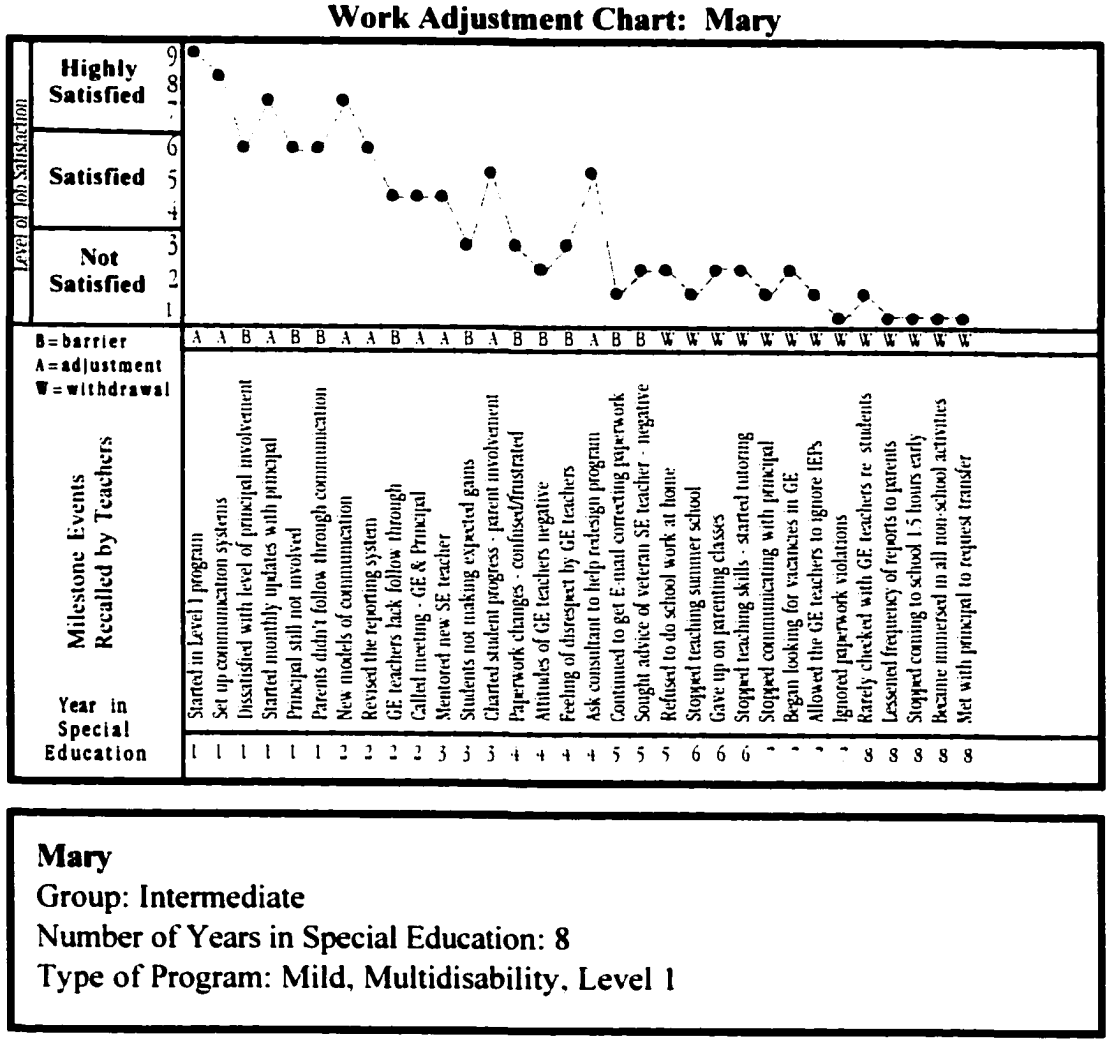

Mary
Group: Intermediate
Number of Years in Special Education: 8
Type of Program: Mild, Multidisability, Level 1

Figure 14. Work adjustment chart: Mary.

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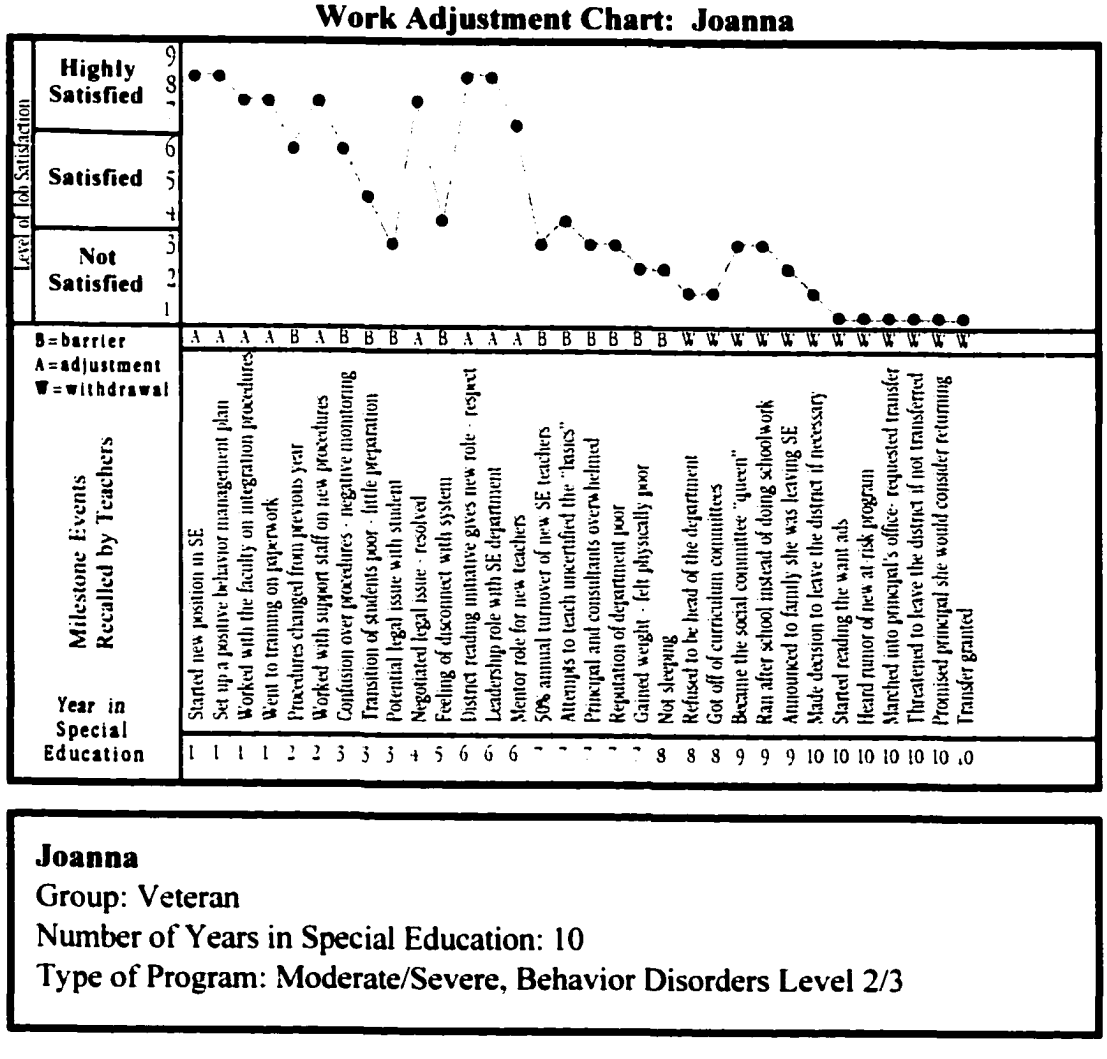

Figure 15. Work adjustment chart: Joanna.

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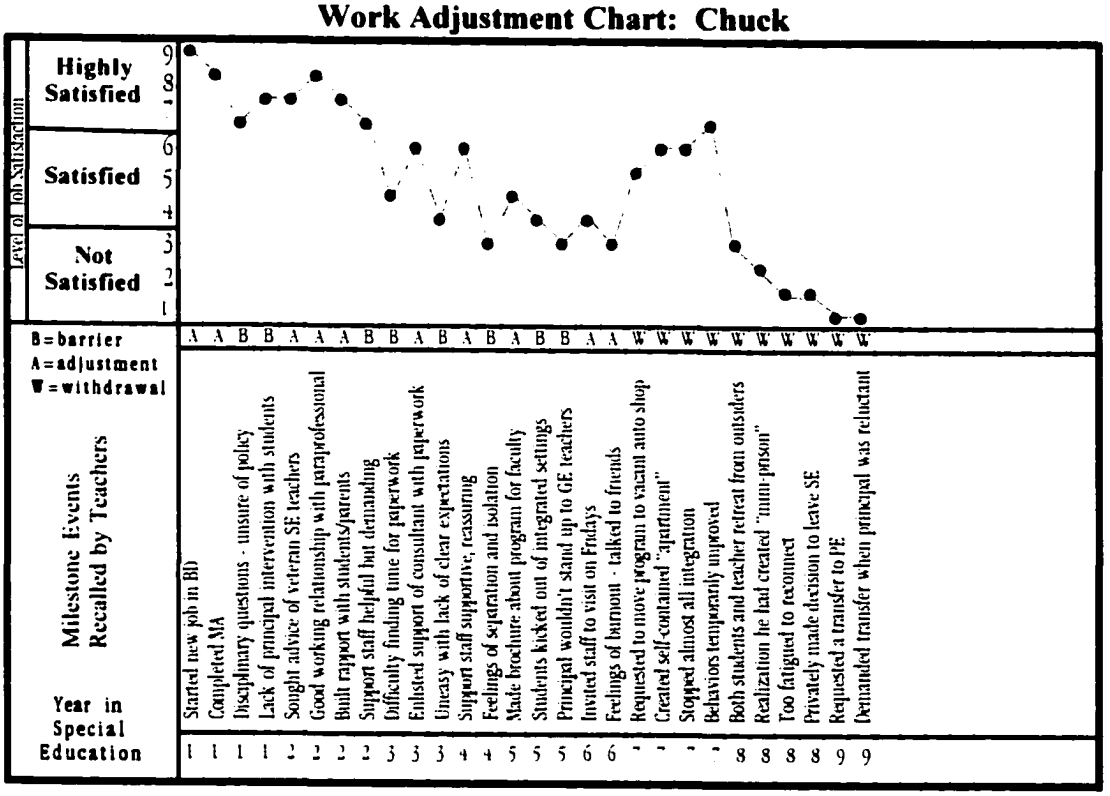

Chuck
Group: Veteran
Number of Years in Special Education: 9
Type of Program: Moderate, Behavior Disorders, Level 2

Figure 16. Work adjustment chart: Chuck.

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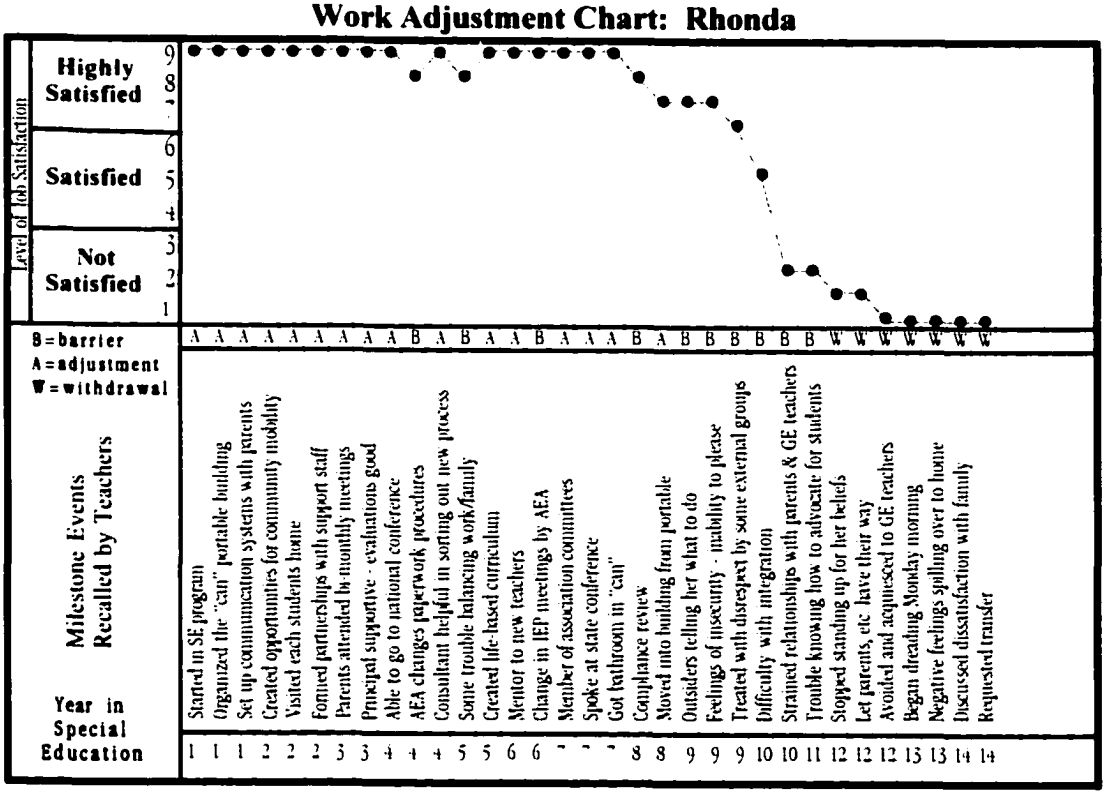

Rhonda
Group: Veteran
Number of Years in Special Education: 14
Type of Program: Moderate Mental & Physical Disabilities, Level 2

Figure 17. Work adjustment chart: Rhonda.

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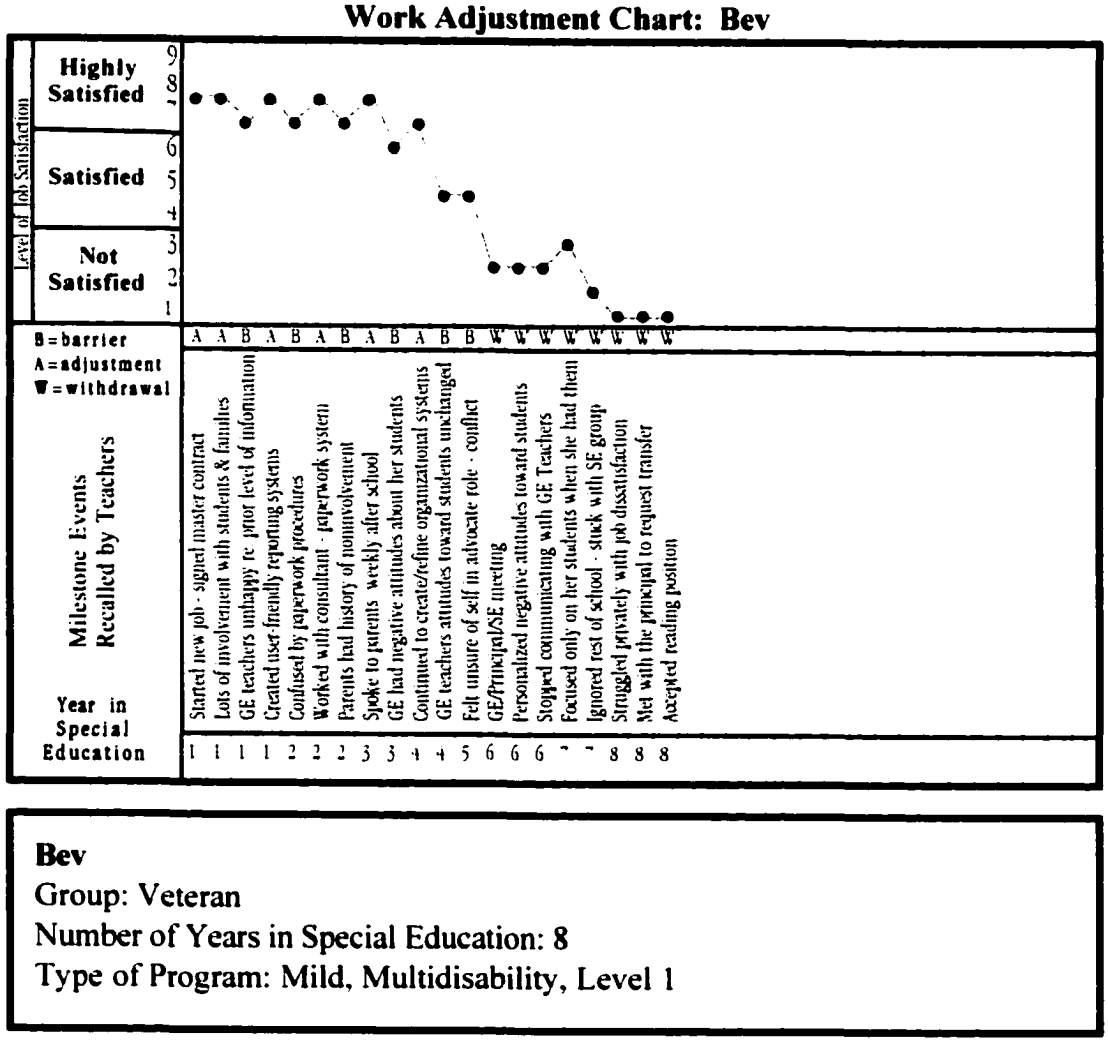

Figure 18. Work adjustment chart: Bev.

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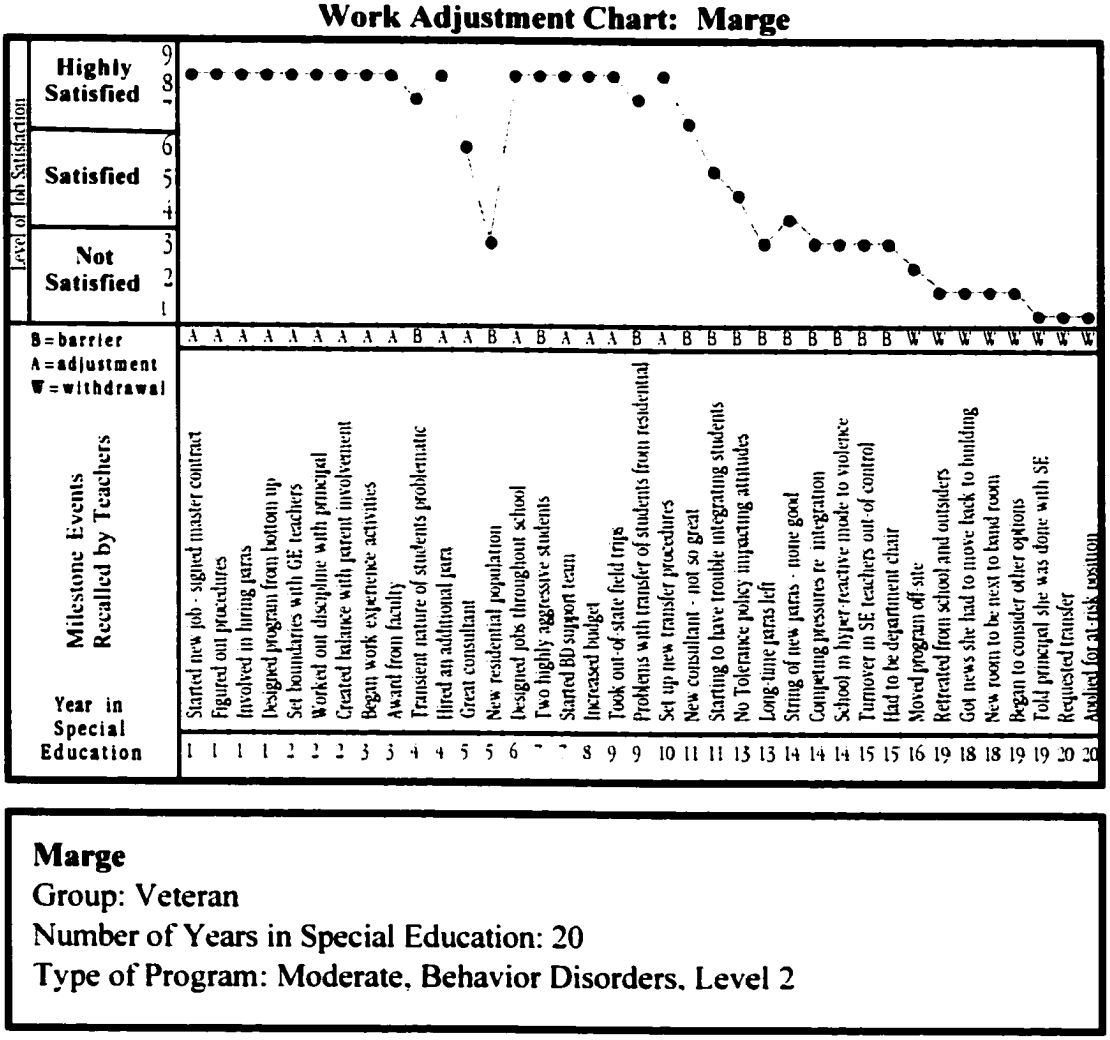

Figure 19. Work adjustment chart: Marge.

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